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*RIVER OF RUINS*



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TRAPICHE: *La Lucicita* (second from right)



# RIVER *of* RUINS

LOUIS J. HALLE, JR.



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To  
MASTER HUGH GLADWIN  
SON OF TOM AND FLORA

My Dearest Hugh:

Two weeks have left their mark  
On both of us since that auspicious day  
When out of the eternal deep-sea dark  
From which we all were cast upon this clay,  
Eyes shut, you landed on our common coast.  
The waves that bore you here bore us here too,  
Our saints, our slaves, our leaders of the host—  
The same safe haven held us while we grew.  
Though charity dwells underneath the lee  
Where you are sheltered still, the great wind blows  
Unmercifully where the wind is free:  
Our time is short, dear Hugh, to study toes.  
Here on the storm-swept plain where cravens crawl,  
May you some day stand up, erect and tall!

L. J. H., JR.

*February 14, 1941.*





All drawings and photographs in this book, except as otherwise acknowledged, are by the author. The drawing of "Mexie" on page 123 is by Thomas F. Gladwin.





## PREFACE

IF THE BROTHERHOOD OF A common pursuit may reach across the ages, this book should contain a salute of some sort to Macaulay's New Zealander. Macaulay had been commenting on the longevity of the Roman Church, and to bring his paragraph to a rounded conclusion he added: "She may still exist in undiminished vigor when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's." That vision, fantastic and real at once, has proved itself as memorable as truth; so perhaps the reason why this ghost of an unborn New Zealander, brought into a book-review to point a casual remark, has not been laid after the lapse of a century is that honest prophecy went into his making. There he perches immortally on his broken arch, sketching the ruins of our present to which he is heir!

A century has passed since Macaulay wrote that, and the vision is, if anything, no longer quite so daring, so fantastic. It seems now that we may catch up with the prophecy sooner than was expected, that the broken arch may be ready for its occupant ahead of time.

Macaulay was a student of history, the universal moral of which is *sic transit*, and it was from reading of the past, not from living under Victoria, that his prophecy was born. But I cannot believe that any of the ancient Mayas foresaw Tom and me, foresaw that in a remote age we two should make our way with difficulty through the wilder-

ness that had repossessed their fields and, taking our stand on the broken arches of their palaces, photograph the ruins of their temples. For those Mayas knew no history except their own, which taught them, if anything, only that the path of civilization is upward. Yet here we undeniably are, Tom and I! Here are the ruins! And here is the New Zealander's volume of sketches! . . .

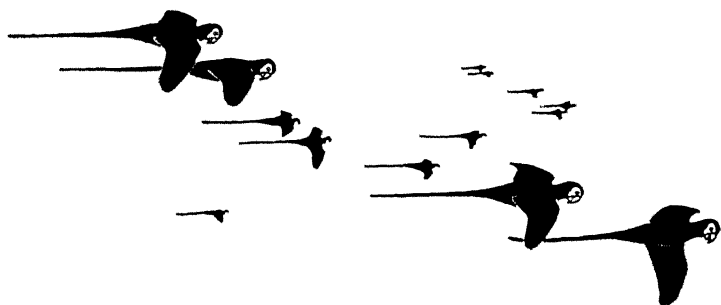
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*RIVER OF RUINS*





## CHAPTER I

“THIS,” I TOLD TOM GLADWIN, “is adventure—to be taken at least once before settling down.”

I was not sure how Tom would accept my proposal for a joint expedition into the tropical wilderness that guards the ruined cities of the Mayas like the forest surrounding the sleeping beauty. Both of us were students of anthropology, our summer vacation was approaching, and on those first warm spring mornings when we stood outside the museum for a quick smoke between classes I would entice Tom with reminiscences of a fabulous world he had not seen. I had myself penetrated that world, tentatively, the year before, and now I looked forward with impatience to returning for a full discovery.

My proposal was, specifically, that the two of us should attempt a long jump across the gap of wilderness that separates the outposts of civilization in Guatemala and Mexico respectively. This region, far from having always been the unsubdued wilderness it is today, a land of rampant jungle largely uninhabited by man, was once the center of a dense

and thriving populace and the scene of the highest culture ever reached by the aboriginal inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere. This is the innermost heart of the land of the Mayas. Though it appears virgin today, the archaeologist, poking among roots and fallen leaves, finds everywhere the magnificent remains of the Mayan Golden Age. There are huge cities of stone here, in the thickest jungle, inhabited only by bats and birds and monkeys, but displaying to the eye of the occasional adventurer who makes his way in to them, if they are known at all, examples of sculpture and architecture that rank with the world's greatest. Our purpose would be to see all this with our own eyes and, if possible, add our mite to the world's knowledge concerning it.

Adventure was what I told Tom; but I was not thinking of mere jungle-melodrama. I had in mind a special sort of adventure, the sort that occurs only in those tales of magic through which we first learned in childhood to know the world.

In the story, the small boy who had never ventured beyond shouting distance of his home was, one fine day, snatched up by the magician, shot through time and space faster than you can cry Jack Robinson, and confronted with the multifarious wonders of the world, its bottomless abysses, its cloud-swept pinnacles, its dragons, its long past and perhaps its future. The account varies. In E. M. Forster's story the boy travels to the Elysian Fields in a Celestial Omnibus and is entertained there by Sir Thomas Browne, Dante, Homer, and other celebrated spirits out of the past. In Oriental versions, a magic carpet is the vehicle. In the latest, most up-to-date revision of the Arthurian romances, the child called Wart is taken by



Merlin to see not only the fishes of the deep and the dragons and the owls, but to review the long unfolding and multiplication of life on this planet since that moment in time when it was first cast loose from the sun. Generally the boy of these tales wakes up, at the end, snug as ever in his own bed, but with a new wisdom that his parents will never fathom.

What, I wonder, does the small boy who has been so far and communed with the ages think about his father and mother, his sisters and brothers, when he wakes up at home again? How does the snug cottage on the village street seem to him then? I picture him as saying to himself: This is my home and I love it—but I had no idea that it was so very small and so humble. Is this paper structure really the unchangeable world I knew yesterday, the universe that I had thought could not ever be otherwise? . . .

The adventure which Tom and I had, as the result of my scheming, was simply that of leaving the snugness of our own civilization to journey through space and time, to gaze upon the lost features of another civilization, and there to behold the great dragon of eld, the primeval wilderness that had returned in the fullness of its strength to triumph upon the ruins. Then we came home. During our absence we had adventures, of course, we underwent hardships and tasted a variety of dangers. But these were nothing. The real adventure was an adventure in understanding. The drama was in the spectacle itself, in the exalted and eternal tragedy of what man has accomplished against nature, and nature against man, in their mortal struggle of the ages. Having beheld, we came back to this gasping civilization of our own, back again from the past and back

from the future to this tumultuous present. How grandly man builds!—and to what imponderable end? . . .

The easiest way to think of the Petén is as the deep southernmost interior portion of the Yucatán peninsula. It is the hand below the finger, the solid continental foundation that supports the seaward projection. Geologically, in fact, the whole Petén is part and parcel of Yucatán, having been born with the peninsula when, in recent geological times, it rose dripping from the sea. It is no kin to the ancient and truly continental earth behind it whose seamed volcanoes might regard even the Andes and our Rockies as mere parvenus. But the limestone plain of which the Petén is a part emerged only in the geological yesterday.

The political boundaries of the Petén are of no concern here, for, in the phraseology of international affairs, they are none of them implemented. Looked at with the eye of the Man from Mars, who can understand nothing so abstruse as a political boundary, the Petén is bounded on the east by the Caribbean shoreline, though we ourselves recognize a coastal strip as forming the colony of British Honduras. On the south a good three-dimensional boundary is provided by the Central American highlands, which wall off the rest of the world. On the west, the Usumacinta River, which drains those highlands, forms a boundary with what is called Mexico beyond. And on the north—on the north there is no visible boundary. The characteristic Petén country merely thins out northward, something else gradually replaces it. The clue to that something else will be found in rainfall-statistics, for it is the heavy rainfall, with all its concomitants, that gives the Petén its character, and

the comparative absence of rainfall that makes Yucatán proper what it is.

The northeast trade-wind, which bears the rain-clouds, has an uninterrupted sweep across the whole flat expanse from north to south until it comes up hard against the ragged continental escarpment that forms its southern boundary. Here its rain-clouds, their way finally blocked, pile up and shed their burden. Nearly a hundred inches of Atlantic rain falls annually along this southern boundary. This average decreases progressively as you go north, away from the barrier, till in northern Yucatán it is a mere twenty inches or less. Consequently, the mighty rain-forest of the south, averaging as high as a hundred and twenty-five feet, gradually dwindles till, in the north, it has fallen away to an expanse of brittle scrub. The average rainfall at any point in this area largely determines its flora and fauna, and an expert biologist can deduce from that figure alone the count of wild-life that such a condition should produce. If you draw a line across the map indicating where the rainfall is fixed at a certain specified average (it may be eighty inches) you will have accurately drawn the northern boundary of the range occupied by one species, the great scarlet-blue-and-yellow macaw. Another isohyetal line, somewhere in the same vicinity, would define the southernmost limit of the ocellated turkey's range. An ornithologist once told me that there was no need for collecting birds in the Petén in order to know the avifauna of the region; all that was needed was rainfall-statistics. Conversely, I suppose, a collection of birds might give all the data that were needed on rainfall.

This parvenu limestone plain, which supports such a varied life, has a human history that, in its uniformity, is

the joy of the archaeologist. Throughout almost the entire remainder of the globe he has to deal with an inextricable tangle of races and cultures, each of which once had its day and left its remains to mingle with those of all the others; but until the Mayan Indians, physically identical with those that inhabit Yucatán today, set foot on it, there is no evidence that any other race of people ever entered it, nor later disputed with them for possession of any except its extreme northern part. The archaeologist here confronts an ideal: one people and one culture, isolated by an accident of history as neatly as if it had been done by scientists in a laboratory.

The original Mayan pioneers who settled this virgin land, probably as early as the 7th century B.C., and possibly much earlier, were not primitive savages in the sense that some Australians are even today. Wherever they came from, they had already acquired the rudiments of a culture that was to burgeon spectacularly in the wet soil of Petén. This region, in their possession, became the Mesopotamia of the New World, the cradle of human culture in the Western Hemisphere, with the added distinction that it remained the seat of the highest culture ever achieved in aboriginal America, the American Greece. If you must have a definite point of origin, you can take Uaxactún, located in the center of the area, in which have been found the earliest fixed and dated remains so far known. From bedrock up, its ruins tell the story of the steady and rapid development of cultural techniques to the point where, in the first five hundred years of our era, the inhabitants already had a great stone architecture of pyramids, palaces, and temples, a mathematical and calendrical system without its peer in all the world, New or Old, and an artistry in sculpture and

pottery that ranks with the best. From this center, the Mayan Old Empire spread out in all directions over the Petén: to Palenque on the west, beyond the Usumacinta; eastward to the Caribbean coast; and northward into Yucatán proper. This was the period of medievalism culminating in a Golden Age, when religion largely directed the activities of the people and the realm was made up of great city-states that probably were rivals. There is a parallel here with the city-states of ancient Greece, of Italy, and of coastal Peru. The church, whatever form it took, was top-dog for most of the period; the impulse which its legend gave to the imagination and the formal discipline which its tyranny imposed on it, in all four regions, produced an art that, in the end, asserted its independence and, realizing its full stature, reached a height never afterwards equaled. As in Greece, as in Italy, as on the coast of Peru, the original spiritual impulse lost its force in a few centuries and an age of spectacular materialism followed.

This Greece, like every other Greece, had its Rome. The Old Empire culture of Petén was extinguished there, or suddenly died out for causes that, in their specific detail, remain unknown. A Macedonian renaissance under the leadership of one Quetzalcoatl followed, some time later, in northern Yucatán, where tourists of today flock to see its ruins at Chichén Itzá and Uxmal. But its glory was to be brief, for in the future Rome of the western world, the city of Mexico, a great military empire was already forming and preparing to expand, while in Europe men were looking out over the western ocean and speculating on the possibility of discovering new trade-routes to the Indies. The Petén, long deserted, remained a land of vast ruins that were soon

overgrown with the undying rain-forest vegetation, the beginning and the end.

For us of the 20th century, the significant fact is that this once flourishing civilization collapsed and is known today only in its ruins. If we are looking for an object-lesson, a tract for our times, perhaps we shall find it here in the Petén. . . .



A year before the spring when Tom and I laid our plans, I had taken part in an exploratory flight over the uninhabited expanses of the Petén and camped for a week and a half in its depths. One day in Guatemala City I was introduced to Ed Shook, an archaeologist with the Carnegie Institution who was planning to leave three days later for the Carnegie camp at Uaxactún in the Petén. Three days later, the two of us and a group of archaeologists set off on a special flight to explore the Petén from the air. After first looking down upon the forest that we should have to traverse, Shook and I planned to make our way through it to the ruins of Uaxactún, starting from Flores, an island-town in the long expanse of Lake Petén-Itzá.

The first stage of that flight was familiar to me. I had already seen those seamed mountains of the highlands, those steep river-valleys, those precariously tilted fields of corn, and the Indian pueblos with their white churches scattered about the landscape. I knew them from the ground, and I had also seen them from the air, as far as to that last long ridge of mountains that bounded our hu-

man world, that stood like a battlemented parapet against the unknown beyond. But now the airplane droned steadily onward, to the ridge and across it. On the far side the mountains gave way rapidly, tier upon tier, like steps going down into the sea. And then I first saw the Petén.

We had come off the edge of the highlands at a considerable height, so that what appeared below us at first was merely a dim airy purplish expanse stretching unbroken to the visible ends of the earth, where it merged imperceptibly with the sky. But now, as we dropped steadily lower, the near reaches became green and substantial, a sea of living foliage, and in the offing, like combers advancing on the shore, a number of low ridges, as straight as arrows from horizon to horizon, extended across our course. Beyond, even this feature was lost. The jungle of Petén appeared as a vast map of two dimensions, unmarked in its whole extent, unbounded except by its merger with the sky all around. Soon we saw the narrow Río de la Pasión (down which Tom and I would one day venture) mapped out below us on the green background of the forest in flat silver coils, the sun flashing sparks from its surface. Later we came over the open savannas that interrupt the forest south of Flores, pale brown plains ringed in by jungle. There was no transition. The massed trees merely met the grasslands and stopped. Islands and peninsulas of forest were scattered over them. And then we returned to a human world. In a wide sweep of savanna we saw the village of La Libertad, with a path or road leading out of it to the north, and by that time we were already idling with muffled motors, gliding toward the long oval mirror of Lake Petén-Itzá, in the midst of which, like a floating button, was the island-town of Flores.

Fifteen minutes after landing we were off again to explore northern Petén. We flew low now, since this was exploration. Below us the jungle rose in a series of sharp waves diminishing toward the perfect flatness of the horizon. The eye took in foliage, foliage stretching away to the limits of vision, foliage beyond the bounds of imagination. Its waves had the abrupt and closely packed aspect of a sea chopped up by conflicting winds, but utterly still to all appearance, alive but motionless. Botán palms broke through from below on long stalks crowned with sprays of pinnate leaves. Occasionally a ragged opening in the mass of foliage would reveal a part of the framework underneath and the lower layers of vegetation, but never the ground itself. Creamy-white king vultures swung about on set wings below us, close over the waves. And this was all. As far as the eye could reach, this was all. Here was the wilderness I had sought, the green first world of the creation, the silence and obscurity of a land without men. . . .

Suddenly—a commotion among the archaeologists in the cabin, a landmark sighted. Far away to our left, above the even line of the western horizon, four needles projected sharply. They might have been, on a colossal scale, those slender conical mounds built by certain species of termite. They stood above the horizon like the masts of a ship hull-down in an otherwise vacant sea. The next moment we knew—these were the great pyramid-temples of Tikal, the dominant structures in a metropolis that is reported once to have been the center of some two million inhabitants, that is now hidden away in the far depths of the uninhabited jungle where few persons have ever seen it. These temples, abandoned now for well over a thousand years, showed clearly at an estimated distance of thirty-five to forty miles.



All this time, since we had crossed the boundary-ridge into the Petén, I was in a state of exaltation such as I have rarely known. The magic carpet of fairy tales had come true and here I, riding on it, was being shown the wonders of the world, its remote places, its fabulous reaches of slumbering wilderness. Here were the temples of gods who had passed from the earth, the palaces of the kings of antiquity, the great forest of legend inhabited only by birds and beasts, the river of Kubla Khan and the Caves of Silence; and here was I on my magic carpet viewing it all!

We were making straight for the temples now, but they were no longer visible to us as we could see only sideways out of the plane. Again the jungle was a desolate ocean of foliage unmarked by man. Shook, in a fever of activity, photographed and recorded in his notebook a hitherto undiscovered pond sunk into the jungle and covered with water-lilies. It shot by below us and was gone.

The motors died abruptly, we came whistling down toward the tree-tops. Was this catastrophe? There was no time for last thoughts. Just as abruptly, the plane banked, swung sideways, and before we could tell what was going to happen next we had shot directly between two of the temples of Tikal! In that moment of passing between them we had looked straight in through their gaping doorways, their lofty roof-combs had been level with our eyes. Immediately we zoomed, banked, came about, and glided back down toward the leafy bed of the jungle. Again we shot between the temples, so close it seemed our wings must rake them, our undercarriage plow up the leaves. The motors roared and died alternately, the air wailed against the plane, temples and trees turned over sideways, then rose to meet and sweep past us time and again. Pandemonium

had already broken loose in the cabin. As the crowd at a bullfight encourages the matador to draw the bull in closer and closer till the horns graze his flank, so a sort of ecstacy came over us that made us cheer hysterically every time the pilot, by banking and swerving adroitly, threaded the plane between the solid stone temples. . . .

Most of the ruins to be found in the jungle are hidden from the sky by dense foliage, so that one can discover them only from below. Tikal, greatest of all these sites, is properly visible from the air alone.

The morning after our flight, Shook and I left Flores at three o'clock in a little boat and, just as the sun pricked the horizon, landed on the eastern shore of the lake, ready to descend into the forest at its brink, into that unknown world of darkness where the great shapes of rooted, tangled vegetation towered in brooding silence. The details don't matter. We had mules, and there was a trail that plunged from the radiant lakeshore into the twilight of the jungle as into a rock cavern. We followed it, in single file, one after another descending into darkness. The last gap closed quickly behind us.

It is like the ocean-floor, and I imagine that the deep-sea diver who plunges from the surface to the depths has much the same feeling as we had. In the first place, there is a sort of fear of breathing, as though it would be dangerous to expand one's lungs too freely. Mentally, at least, one holds one's breath. Then there is the sensation that sooner or later one must emerge again, that this is not a world in which men were meant to survive. Not a man's world at all! The vegetation, monstrous, disordered, and utterly silent, but still made up of living beings, breathing and growing, fulfills the forms of an alien world. Time

and space are not as we know them above. These gigantic, silent forms make no response whatsoever. Oh, if a wild beast should attack, that would be one thing! There is no thought of that here. This world merely is what it is passively; merely by its inhuman scale, by its immutability, by its lack of any response to man's presence, it warns him away from it. But it does not attack. A creeper with fine thorns dangling across the trail may be pushed out of the way or slashed with one's machete. It makes no resistance. An owl perched in the ragged opening of a hollow tree far up overhead merely opens its eyes and shuts them again, opens and shuts them. There is no overt hostility in this world, but a vast indifference. Where a creeper has been slashed another will grow up again, and there will have been no change. Some owl will always be perched somewhere overhead, opening and shutting its eyes. This world is alien, alien . . . but much too large to be coped with. The trail, which would be overgrown within a few weeks if it were not kept open by the constant passage of men with machetes, is your only security. It is human and evanescent. But twenty paces off it to either side men become lost and go mad. They actually do. There have been cases of it, and there will be more. It is no use shouting for help, even at a short distance, because the vegetation passively screens the sound of the human voice. It is no use running, because all directions are the same, the same monstrous shapes. It is no use calling on heaven above, for even the sky is cut off from sight and sound. Your only security, if you are a man, is a trail that will not remain open for any length of time, that threatens always to vanish before you. The trail is your life-line, like the

rope that connects the diver with the surface of the ocean. If it is broken . . .

That sensation of not daring to breathe freely is only one of the forms of fear. But fear, too, can be pleasant. Of all the emotions it is the most exhilarating—for a time, at least, and in measure. Men encounter it voluntarily where there is no motive of greed or vainglory to spur them on. In that spirit they tell each other ghost stories to feel the tingle of the unknown along their spines. Well, this is like a ghost story, this jungle, these cavernous depths in which the disordered forms of trunk and branch, the masses and layers of heavy foliage, remain strangely still, sheltering an unseen life that is not human. The difference is that this is real—there is no suspicion of artful fabrication. It is more real than all the world of human civilization, of motor-roads and public squares, because it came before and will remain after. It tells the adventurous man what the city-dweller never learns, that mankind inhabits a world that is alien to it, alien and colossally indifferent. It mocks man's morality along with his enterprise, his art with his science, by its shocking and invincible indifference. These forms of aspiration belong to the world that men seek to establish on this sphere where they abide temporarily—but this is the world that is, this is man's final immortality.

The "silence" of the jungle must not be taken literally. It is an impression that overlooks details. Actually there are sounds, continuous, repetitious, unceasing. But if these sounds were in proportion to the visible grandeur of the tropical forest they would be deafening to human ears, like a clap of thunder prolonged indefinitely. It is all a matter of proportion. . . .

Two days after leaving the lake Shook and I came into

the ancient city of Tikal. The trail to Tikal, tunneling through this dark and oppressive forest, at last comes alongside a steep hill, almost a wall, buried under vegetation. Nothing shows that this is the site of an ancient city. Though you stand in the midst of the colossal remains, you do not know it. You have to pull yourself up by twigs and vines to climb the stone slope, and long before you reach the level of the tree-tops you are puffing and dripping. Suddenly, then, you emerge from the twilight below into the open sun-drenched sky to find yourself standing on a stone platform before the gaping door of one of these temples, where Mayan priests, dead for over a thousand years, performed the ritual of their religion before worshipping multitudes in the plaza (now hidden by jungle) at the foot of the pyramid. Confronting you across the sea of leaves that almost laps your feet are the three other pyramid-temples that dominate the site, their massive roof-combs towering above them. When you enter the dark interior, which smells of ancient moldy dampness, streams of bats brush out past you into the daylight with a loud fluttering of wings. Yet, for all the time that has passed since these temples were last occupied, the plaster of the inner walls is so smooth and white still that it might have been laid the week before. These temples of Tikal, because of their massive construction, are the best preserved as well as the most imposing monuments of the Mayan civilization. Some of the walls are over thirty feet thick.

The other temples loom very close to you across the roof of the jungle, but they are hard to find from below when you have clambered down into darkness again, just as a foundered ship, though its mast showed above water,

might not be easily discovered by a diver in the darkness of the ocean-floor. Machete in hand, you cut your way through the vegetation, stumbling over sculptured stones that lie half-hidden at your feet, and if you do succeed in reaching the temple you are looking for you will not find it until you are almost up against the wall of the pyramid that supports it. But whatever direction you take, you come across other ruins, temples and palaces, that do not rise above the top of the forest and so are not visible from above. Monkeys swarm along branches that span broken walls, parrots fly screaming through open courtyards, toucans balance uncertainly in hanging vines over crumbled roofs. The limits of the city have never been explored, but it is beyond reasonable doubt the most extensive aboriginal site in the New World.



Our first evening out from the lake, Shook and I made camp at one of the rare *aguadas* or water-holes that are found in northern Petén. In a setting that resounded with the evening calls of unseen birds and the dismal barking and moaning of monkeys somewhere in the distance, I hung my hammock between two trees and set about preparing myself to spend the night. I was badly equipped for the purpose, and I mention that fact here because it reveals, what Tom did not know, my inexperience. I had, of course, bought the most obvious necessities for assaulting a tropical wilderness before leaving the city: a compass, a

boy-scout knife, a machete, blankets, a hammock, a *pabellón*. . . .

Most important of all was the *pabellón*. Literally translated, a *pabellón* is a pavilion, but in its local usage it means a mosquito-bar. An ordinary *pabellón* for suspending over a bed or cot consists only of four walls and a roof, all made of some muslin that allows as much circulation of air as is compatible with wholly preventing the circulation of mosquitoes. The *pabellón* to be worn with a hammock differs in that it has a long sleeve built in at either end through which the cords of the hammock pass, with drawstrings to close it. My *pabellón*, the ready-made one that, influenced by the smooth tones of a clerk who knew it was just what I needed, I had bought in the city, was an ordinary sleeveless one!

Veterans always expect greenhorns to act their part, and the amusement which the first sight of my brand-new mosquito-bar afforded Shook was, I am sure, a full return for the additional risk he had incurred in having me along. That *pabellón* provides him with dinner-table conversation to this day. What I did—the only thing I could do—was to cut a hole in either end with my boy-scout knife, pass the hammock cords through, and trust to luck and bits of string to keep the mosquitoes out.

But I had not been in my hammock more than a few minutes when, in addition to all the other noises of the jungle, I began to detect a faint whining sound. It was a high-pitched and faraway drone, musical and not very loud, but disturbing. It seemed to recede and approach, approach and recede, and in a few more minutes I was completely surrounded by it. It was everywhere. Several times it came in close, rose to a shrill climax, and stopped. Then, feeling

a slight pricking on my ear, on the back of my neck, or on my face, I would swoop and strike with my open palm. My hands were never still for long. No sooner did I settle down to sleep than I was suddenly obliged to strike out again by the whine close to my ear, the abrupt silence, the little stab that followed. I turned on my flashlight and surveyed my muslin room in its beam. Already there were quite a few mosquitoes inside, delicate buzzing creatures with hanging legs, too many for me to deal with. I turned the light off again, reflected that I had better get a good night's sleep even if I did wake in the morning covered with welts, and made up my mind to pay no more attention to such a picayune disturbance. Shook, the two muleteers, and the native cook we were taking along were already breathing heavily and contentedly in sleep. In a few moments, shutting my mind to the increasing drone, I should be doing the same. If I wanted to listen to anything I could concentrate on the whistles, the screams, and the moans from the surrounding forest. When a mosquito bit me I pretended not to notice. I played 'possum and did not move.

The next time I turned on my flashlight I could hardly see to the end of the *pabellón*. The mosquitoes were no longer to be reckoned by individuals. They formed a cloud, a thick droning fog in the beam of light. The muslin walls and ceiling were heavily peppered with them. There was something fantastic and extremely frightening in the sight. All thought of sleep finally left me. A few minutes later I was seized by a fit of temporary insanity and began thrashing about wildly, striking out at the air, beating myself all over, grunting and shouting, and at each blow I killed handfuls of mosquitoes. . . .

In the morning before daylight, when we rose to break



camp, Shook complained that he had been awakened several times during the night by boisterous sounds from inside my *pabellón*, a sterling testimonial to his prowess as a sleeper.

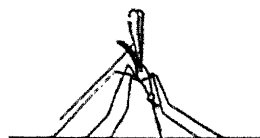
The following evening, when we made camp, I found a way to make my *pabellón* secure against mosquitoes by carefully darning the holes at either end with string. The sense of relief with which I sank into my hammock that night was one of those matchless experiences that are recorded only in poetry. I found a hammock extraordinarily comfortable and luxurious, and it was only my second night in one. I would not have exchanged it for any bed. The way it adapted itself to the natural position of the relaxed body was such sheer delight that I deliberately kept myself awake for a few minutes to enjoy it. I listened again to the great nocturnal chorus of the tropical forest, but this time in peace. If I heard the drone of mosquitoes I was at least secure in the knowledge that they were outside my muslin walls.

I was already dozing when the rain came. It came spattering at first, a few big drops colliding with the surrounding foliage. I hardly felt it, though an occasional drop, striking the ceiling of my *pabellón*, sprayed my face. But the sound of spattering was quickly replaced by a roar, which could be heard advancing across the top of the forest like a moving waterfall. And then it struck.

Shook had hung his hammock and *pabellón* under a simple palm-leaf lean-to which some former camper had left here. By the time I was fully awake, our cook, Moisés, had already scampered over to the lean-to and taken shelter on the ground inside Shook's *pabellón*. In a moment I had abandoned my luxurious hammock and done the same.

Moisés and I spent that night on the bug-infested floor of the jungle, under Shook's suspended body, which cleared the ground by hardly a foot, and in a space so crowded that none of us could change position except by prearrangement with the other two. And it rained all that night, and it rained all the next day, and for two days and two nights thereafter.

When I came out of the jungle, by the same trail to the shore of the lake, it was alone with one muleteer. But I had with me, now, a proper *pabellón*, borrowed from Shook, and Shook's personal tooth-brush, which I had likewise had to borrow. Twice, during those three days, riding alone, I knew the chilling fear of finding that I had got off the trail. And I did not even have a compass with me! The one I had bought before leaving Guatemala City had disappeared mysteriously from my baggage and did not reappear, again in my baggage and again mysteriously, till after my return.



This one experience of a land-expedition in the tropics was to be our mainstay on the much greater expedition Tom and I were soon definitely planning. It gave me the status of a veteran in his eyes. He agreed to stake his life on it, apparently without the least thought that it might not be a first-rate risk.

Tom is tall, blond, and happy. I wanted him to go with me on this new expedition into the same wilderness because he has so many of the qualities that make a good traveling companion—intelligence, the gift of conversation,

abundant health and energy, lack of temperament, and best of all, a serene disposition in all circumstances. I have rarely seen Tom when he was not as happy as a small boy at an ice-cream party. His is the open, unguarded attitude of one who believes with unshakable confidence that this world was especially made for his pleasure and that it could not possibly, therefore, manifest anything but the most loving kindness to his person. It is his home, his nest of comforts. We others may sometimes feel like strangers in it, but never he! I wanted Tom to be my partner in this enterprise for his happy disposition, but also because there were so many fascinating possibilities in the prospect of showing him through some of the more spectacular, if dark, neglected, and infested chambers of his own dwelling.

In urging Tom to accompany me, however, I did not allow myself to minimize the dangers and hardships we should have to face. I said frankly that we would be beyond all medical care and comfort, yet constantly exposed to filth and disease. We would have to stay on our feet no matter what happened, or we might be done for. An attack of appendicitis would, very likely, be fatal. We might starve. We would be helplessly at the mercy of natives who might not scruple to murder us for the boots on our feet. Like others who had gone before, we might be dashed to death in the rapids we should have to navigate. Wild animals might attack. It would not be the first time that men had entered such a wilderness and never been heard of again. I reminded him of Fawcett and Redfern. At best, I told him, we would be soaked by the rain, baked by the sun, and overwhelmed by clouds of stinging mosquitoes. I knew! . . .

"Never mind all that," said Tom. "As for appendicitis—nothing could give me greater pleasure than to operate on you with my boy-scout knifel" Of course it did not occur to him that *he* might be the victim.

And so it was settled. . . .





## CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ITEM WE PUT down on the list of supplies to be bought was three proper *pabellónes* for the two of us, and to that we added compasses and tooth-brushes. But there were innumerable other things to think of, not all of them easy to get. There were also the problems of how much food to take along, how long we would be gone, to what extent we could live off the country by obtaining our supplies from natives along the way or shooting game. We were immeasurably benefited by Shook's constant and unstinting advice; he was one of the few outsiders who had ever visited the region into which we were going, having been through with a Carnegie Institution expedition the year before.

The problem of the itinerary and the length of time it would take us was especially difficult, because we had to make our expedition in the rainy season and there was no way of telling whether it was even possible then, let alone how long it would take. Shook, like a sensible fellow, had been through in the dry months. From Flores we would go south across the savannas of central Petén to the Río de la

Pasión, which I knew from the air as a narrow winding ribbon of silver across an otherwise unbroken sea of green. We would go down the Pasión by dugout to where it met the Río Salinas flowing from the western highlands of Guatemala, down the Salinas to its junction with the Lacantún and the beginning of the Río Usumacinta, and down the Usumacinta as far as it was navigable—then overland to Tenosique, the uppermost town on the river and the farthest outpost of civilized Mexico. There Tom and I would part, he to return directly to the United States (he knew in advance that he would have had enough by that time—there was a girl waiting for him in California), and I to cross the savannas of Tabasco and Chiapas to the ruined city of Palenque, thence to make my way out again as best I could. We would have to shoot rapids on the river above the point where the mule-trail began, and it was a question whether that was possible at high water. The trail to Tenosique was swampy in the dry season—it might be impassable during the rains. In any case, as it could not be traveled in less than two long days under the best conditions, it would probably require at least six days and unutterable tribulation while our mules swam or floundered to their bellies in mud. We might have to wait a fortnight at this place, a week at the other place, ten days at a third place. We might get to a point where we couldn't go forward, where we couldn't go back. We might die of some horrible disease or be shot full of arrows by the wild tribes of Lacandón Indians. If we were lucky we might get through unscathed in a month. With a little less luck it might take a year.

In any case, it was impossible for us to lay out a timetable in which we could have confidence, and it was im-

possible to calculate how much food we would consume without knowing how long we would be out. Shook reported that one could sometimes obtain eggs or fruit or cornmeal from natives along the way, but that they often had barely enough for themselves and could not be induced to relinquish what they had. Another archaeologist, Linton Satterthwaite, who knew the lower river well, reported that famines among the sparse population of the upper river were of fairly frequent occurrence.

That was the kind of uncertainty in which we made our plans. In many respects we were leaping into the dark and trusting to luck. I was worried but not alarmed till, possibly, the evening before we sailed, when Satterthwaite, going over the plans with me, gave expression to his tacitly qualified admiration of our recklessness. I was glad Tom was not present. Tom, for his own part, had been advised by Dr. Vaillant of the American Museum of Natural History not even to consider such an attempt, a piece of advice which he considerably kept to himself.

At the end of a week in Guatemala City we were both of us haggard. We were under the illusion that we had the *pabellón*-situation well in hand. We had purchased in New York, at a shop that specializes in outfitting fancy expeditions, the best hammock-*pabellón* that money could buy, made of a unique and wondrous cloth that was light as gossamer and strong as steel. It even had a draw-string around the bottom edge, and other special gadgets that had been invented to minister to the comfort and security of the tropical explorer. In Guatemala we took our wonderful *pabellón* into the leading dry-goods store, where it created a sensation, and ordered it reproduced in duplicate in the

finest material available. Tom was scornful of the extraordinary attention I paid to this one item, but I knew that this was a case where my experience made me the gainer. "The *pabellón*," I told him sententiously, "constitutes the most important single item in the equipment of the tropical camper."

Considering how much it was necessary for us to trust to luck, we were remarkably thorough in our plans. We even prepared for the vital psychological problems that beset two men alone in the wilderness. Tom was appointed Social Director by acclamation. He mapped out our conversation for every stage of the way, and in a burst of generosity he fixed it so that I would not have to do any talking at all. On the *Pasión* he was to explain to me why watches that do not keep time run slow more often than fast. After we passed the mouth of the *Pasión* he would begin on the principle of polarized light, which would occupy him till we arrived at the mouth of the *Lacantún*. Various types of airplane construction and the technique of conducting a swing orchestra were also on his agenda. I offered to do my share by explaining to him the ecology of the Central American avifauna, the development of the Russian novel, and the basic problems of Mayan archaeology, but he would not hear of it. As Social Director he gave my offer his official consideration and found it unacceptable.

Tom, who is a scientist and has what amounts to a genius for explanation, also revealed to me, at this time, the basic Law of Expeditions, by virtue of which we were engaging in what seemed an inordinate amount of preliminary work and expense. The work of equipping any expedition, he proclaimed, is a fixed quantity, or one that fluctuates only within narrow limits. Thus there is no more work attached



to buying twenty pounds of sugar for two men for two years than to buying two pounds for two men for two months. On the other hand, quoth he, expeditions fluctuate widely in their length. The Law, then, may be stated in the form of a simple equation in which a fixed amount of preliminary work,  $x$ , taken together with a variable expedition-length,  $y$ , produces a proportion of preliminary work to expedition-length,  $\frac{x}{y}$ , that varies inversely to the second term of the equation. Stated briefly, the smaller the expedition-length, the higher the proportion of preliminary work. *Ergo*, our expedition-length, which we calculated at roughly two months, was entirely too small. Tom offered to go further and bring in the Law of Diminishing Returns, but this time it was my turn to find his offer unacceptable.

At last our preparations were completed. Early one morning we left Guatemala City by train for Puerto Barrios, the Caribbean port of the republic. By 8:30 the next morning we were out on the airfield at Puerto Barrios, where the Ford transport plane waited under canvas to carry us to Flores, in the heart of the Petén.



The airfield at Flores is a narrow strip of cleared land lying along the lakeshore opposite the village. At one side are two corrugated-iron warehouses, affording the only shelter in which to escape the grilling rays of the sun. There

is no escape from the heat itself. One wonders how the natives endure it year in and year out. They haul the heavy sacks of sugar and flour from the big plane, balance them on their backs, and, sweating profusely, carry them through the sunlight into the gaping door of the warehouse. Even the half-dozen assorted idlers who are always on hand in the shade of the warehouse to greet the plane have skins covered with fine dew. They were born that way, it is the natural condition of their existence.

These men of Petén are a ramshackle, undefinable lot—like a collection of odd boots and shoes—for the settlements that have grown up by the water's edge in modern times are little more than gatherings of drifters who have floated into the center of the continent and become lodged against the shores of Lake Petén-Itzá like bits of straw at the margin of a stream. For a while they hold; then the current catches them and bears them on. The current takes a definite course and can be charted. It flows up the Belize River from the Caribbean coast through British Honduras into the Petén, broadens out about the lake, winds on across the savannas of central Petén till it meets the Pasión River, and flows down it into the Usumacinta, where it encounters a contrary current from Mexico and eventually becomes confused and lost, though traces of it can be found all the way to the Gulf. It crosses two major political boundaries, but these do not impede it. They are merely for future use, should it someday become necessary to dam the stream. They exist, as yet, only in the wilderness, where there are no officials to inquire into a man's nationality. Even criminals can find refuge here, in this anonymous wilderness that still holds civilization back at either hand.

Flores has only one industry, one reason for existence—

chicle, from which chewing-gum is made. Its men are all *chicleros*. When chicle is booming the current sets strongly from Belize, where nothing ever booms any more. Men of mixed races come looking for jobs and are sent out into the forest to the north, carrying their worldly goods on their backs, their machetes in their hands. Most of the year is spent in the inner depths of the jungle, bleeding the chicle-producing sapodilla trees that are found along the way. In the evenings the *chicleros* sit about their campfires; at night they rest under *pabellones* slung between trees. I have encountered the little bands of three or four or half-a-dozen men in the forest and camped with them. They are a gay lot for company, and like all men who lead isolated lives have cultivated the art of telling tales, which is their sole entertainment. It takes the place of radio. Squatting around their campfires, night after night, they spin endless stories to each other, stories full of drama, humor, and pathos, all of which is registered in their faces in turn as the tales unfold. At occasional intervals they return to Flores, the metropolis, and spend their wages in one blaze of glory.

Almost any one of these *chicleros*, these men of Flores, could claim ancestors from three continents. Their roots are everywhere and, consequently, nowhere. Their faces, their bodies, their temperaments are a blend of African, European, and aboriginal American. Their colors are a fusion of red, white, and black. They are men of such varied and cosmopolitan origin that they have no intelligible past to give force and direction to their present. They are the products of innumerable collisions between peoples, and have somehow been dumped here into this twilight zone where no one takes root.

It needs more than an industry to make men take root

in a country. Something must move in men's spirits before they can call an abode their home. The Indians who live in the highlands to the south occupy a land that is, in many respects, far less rich than the Petén or Manhattan. But they have lived there for untold centuries and have a comprehensible common culture, a common soul—expressed in their own costumes, their own worship, their own industry, and their own festivities—that is now a part of the land itself and would not be the same anywhere else. It is this common culture, built up through countless generations of their ancestors, that holds them to it and gives a meaning to their existence. And they are only one branch, a mere remnant, of the great tree that once had its primary roots in the Petén. It is strange that they should have survived, that they should have preserved their cultural heritage, when the Itzás of Petén, who formed the last Mayan state to succumb to the European conquest, have now totally disappeared from the region in which they had established themselves; for the highland Quichés and their related tribes gave their allegiance to the Spanish crown in 1524, the Itzás not until 1697.

The Itzás, however, were not the people who created the present archaeological glories of Petén, though they were of the same Mayan stock. The Indians who built Tikal and Uaxactún had deserted their cities and vanished from the area long before the historical Itzás came into it, and nothing is known of them today. The Itzás were merely a refugee remnant from Chichén Itzá, the capital of northern Yucatán, who fled southward into the wilderness on the break-up of the second Mayan Empire. They had been in Petén, among the ruins of their predecessors, no more than a couple of centuries when the European conquest began.

Their place of refuge was Tayasal, a fortified island-city in the lake, identified with the present-day Flores. Bernal Diaz, who accompanied Cortés on his spectacular march from Mexico to Honduras in 1524, was the first to give an account of Tayasal, though he remained on the shore of the mainland while his chief, with an escort of thirty bowmen, crossed the water by dugout to visit the city. He describes it in his quaint style as "a little island surrounded by water, and if not in canoes, it is impossible to enter it by land; and the houses and temples gleamed white at the more than two leagues at which they were seen, and it was the principal of other little villages that are thereabouts."

If Flores has any claim to historical remembrance it is as the site of the apotheosis of Cortés's horse, Morcillo. Morcillo, his fat having melted in his body from a strenuous deer-chase on the savannas (as Diaz puts it), was left behind to recover among the marveling Itzás when the expedition moved on. He was promptly housed in one of the temples, worshiped as the God of Thunder, and presented with offerings of flowers, honey, and meat on which to nourish himself. When he died, in spite of divinity and mortal worship, an image was made of him and substituted in the temple as the chief deity of the city, surviving till a century later, when two militant Spanish missionaries passed that way and, finding it there, demolished it.

By the end of the 17th century, Yucatán and Mexico to the north, and Guatemala to the south, had already been flourishing centers of Spanish culture for some hundred and fifty years. Mexico City, once the capital of the Aztec Empire, was as Spanish as Seville; so were Guatemala City and Valladolid in Yucatán. But that one stubborn strip of wilderness still separated the two areas of civilization, as it does

today, and in the midst of it the Itzás maintained the last unconquered native kingdom in the Spanish New World. Then the order came from Spain to build a road in the jungle, connecting Yucatán and Guatemala, and missionaries were sent in advance to prepare the way; for religion must precede roads, whatever may become of it afterwards. Such was the prestige of Spain—though by that time the Empire was rotting badly at the core—that the Itzás succumbed without a struggle and sent an embassy to Yucatán to acknowledge the overlordship of the king and the truth of the Gospel.

Today you may search as you will, there are no more Itzás. Even the memory of them has been lost in the land of their refuge. The present population in the country is a rootless population of mixed breeds, existing by ways that are beyond their comprehension, and if there is a drop of Itzá blood in any one of them he is not aware of it himself. But the stubborn strip of aboriginal wilderness persists, though the order may come any day now to lay out a pipeline where once a road was planned.

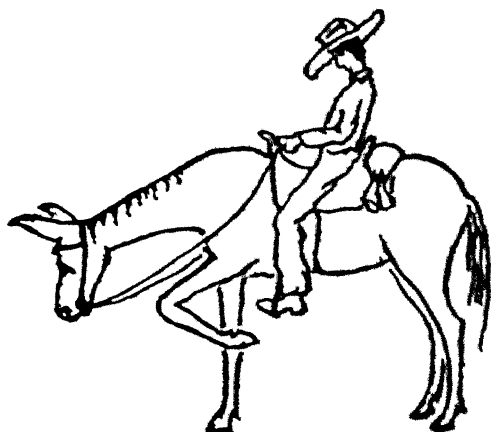
Across the water from us, Flores rose like a pitiful imitation of Mont Saint Michel. It consisted, for the most part, of tightly packed plaster houses, those at the outer edge already half drowned in the rising waters of the lake, which threaten some day to engulf them completely; but at its apex a number of slender coconut palms drooped their heads beside an old church with twin towers. We landed by dugout, rather aimlessly, at the doorstep of one of the first houses we came to, and unloaded our baggage on some exposed rocks outside, taking special pains in handling the large tin of pulverized coffee we had bought in Barrios that

morning. That tin was already the bane of our existence, for its cap would not stay on, no matter what we did to it, and wherever we went it left a spoor that any amateur detective could have followed with ease. There was a light powdering of coffee already on the rocks and in the bottom of the dugout, and undoubtedly a trail of coffee betrayed our path across the airfield.

The outermost houses are so closely packed that they form an almost continuous wall around the island, so that almost any place you land in Flores you have to go through somebody's house to reach the street. This is perfectly all right. The inhabitants of the water's edge are used to it and pay no attention to the strangers who come and go through their private rooms. The street itself is the longest street in the world, for it has neither beginning nor ending. Keeping to it, you can make the circuit of the island in about five minutes. It is made of rough cobblestones and has never known other than pedestrian traffic, for no vehicles of any sort have been introduced into Flores.

Tom and I spent one day and one night in Flores. The morning after our arrival we set forth, at last, on the expedition that had been planned months before as we stood on the steps of the museum in faraway North America.





### CHAPTER III

**C**HANCE HAPPENED TO BE good at the time, and mules were not readily available. But, the day after our arrival in Flores, three mules were being sent out to pasture on the savannas of La Libertad, and we immediately enlisted as supercargo. Our unthinkable alternative was an automobile ride, a prospect that there was reason to contemplate with horror. The count of automobiles in Petén now totals exactly five, of which three are in intermittent use, or were when last heard of. But there is nothing that you could properly call an automobile road, and nobody would ordinarily prefer such travel to muleback except for the sheer thrill of it. The automobile in which we were offered a ride to La Libertad (for twenty-five dollars, first-asking price) was a brand-new General Motors station-wagon which had just been imported by a native of La Libertad who sought, thereby, to challenge the social pre-eminence of La Libertad's leading citizen and erstwhile plutocrat, the owner of three noble but decrepit Fords.

It was after eleven o'clock when we finally pushed off from the outer houses of Flores, bag and baggage, to pad-



dle over to the south shore. The expedition was, at last, under way! On the south shore, at a scattering of huts called Pueblo Nuevo, the expedition promptly came to a halt while the loading of the pack-mule was attended to. This was a test we had been awaiting with a little anxiety. A mule can carry two hundred pounds, and the total weight of our baggage was within that limit, but the load must be packed and distributed according to scientific principles, so that its weight and, roughly, its volume may be equitably balanced between port and starboard. The two arrieros grumbled and thought it could not be done. Arrieros always grumble and think it cannot be done—and always end by doing it. All they need is a little urging to display their consummate artistry. We were already having trouble with the chocolate in the haversack, which was turning to mud and running into places where it did not belong. It was moved from sunny-side to shady-side, and the large slab of it I carried in my shirt-pocket was turned so that it should ooze inside rather than out. The essence of the successful expedition is strict attention to detail.

The mule was loaded and, at last, the expedition was under way! We rode along the lakeshore, past Indian huts with flowers and vines, with countless scabby curs and pigs and naked brown children in the dust. I remember a dusky woman in a blue dress who stood in the doorway of her hut and watched us ride past, as one does remember inconsequential details out of the great mass of momentary impressions. It was half an hour after high noon, and the sun was violent. I was just getting used to the feel of the animal beneath me and adjusting myself to his uneven gait. Like all the mules I have ever ridden, he could be

held to his pace only by continual effort. At the end of every little spurt he slowed down and had to be switched into motion again. But the reaction of my switch-hand had not yet become automatic, as it would in a few hours.

What I like best is that intermediate shuffling gait, half-way between a walk and a trot, that a mule knows so well how to manage if you only try hard enough to bring him to a full trot. It has a rhythm that is the mule's nearest approach to the ineffable. It is also the best mile-gainer for a long ride. But chiefly, it has a quality which is provocative of that spirit of abstracted reverie that is to me the prime joy of a long ride. Galloping is better, but it is too exhilarating for thought, and besides, it is beyond the average Petén mule's utmost capacity. A walk quickly leads to boredom and impatience; and the mule has a gift for reducing his walking-speed so gradually and insensibly that, if you happen to have sunk into an abstracted mood anyway, you may come to your senses to find that for the past few minutes you have been at a dead standstill. That little running-walk is the best, but it requires persistence for the first couple of hours to persuade any mule that you mean him to do exactly that. Finally he will agree to your purpose, if he is at all worth his fodder, and then nothing could be happier.

We were just at the initial stage of the process here, but buoyed up and encouraged by the stimulating knowledge that we were at last on our way, under our own steam. A few minutes after leaving Pueblo Nuevo we rode into the lakeshore village of San Benito, where we turned abruptly round a corner and, with our backs to the lake, headed south—toward La Libertad and, beyond it, the Río de la Pasión. The Río de la Pasión! One moment, please! It was

necessary for us to leave our names and destination with the commanding officer of the village-garrison—but one of the *arrieros* could attend to that and catch up with us later. Here in Petén official formality is more informal than elsewhere. Soon we would be beyond even that, for this was the very pale of officialdom and ahead of us now lay the frontier where all the activities of the governments of mankind come to an end.

The road, or rather the complex of raveled footpaths that added up to a road of sorts, at first ran through abandoned *milpa* scrubland. This kind of country is typical of village-outskirts in Mexico and Central America, for the *milpa* system of agriculture is widely practiced among the natives. It is a system that could only function where real-estate values are non-existent. First the jungle is burned and hacked down somehow over an area of several acres. Then the Indian corn is planted with the aid of a pointed stick between the charred boles and stumps. After two crops have been harvested, as a rule, another patch of jungle is cleared and the old land, exhausted, soon takes on a thick covering of the hardier shrubs and bushes. This fallow land is what you see for a short distance along the road out of any village in the wilderness.

All the vast forest of Petén may at one time have been *milpa* land of this sort, though there is reason to believe that the Mayan company of mathematical, astronomical, and artistic geniuses must have included agricultural experts sufficiently sophisticated to have developed a system of intensive agriculture. For in those days Petén was one of the most crowded areas of its size in the world, supporting a population considerably denser, according to the most conservative estimates, than that of the present state of New

York. Whatever the system, the region must have been farmland from end to end, and the forest of today, which looks as if it had been left over from the Creation, is actually a secondary growth. It may even be that those little patches of African veldt, the savannas, that occur south of the lake, are the product of old-time agricultural exhaustion pure and simple. The extensive forested swamps that make travel difficult (often impossible) throughout northern Petén may be the remains of lakes that became silted up after centuries of agricultural erosion.

It is not the least distinction of Petén that, contrary to what you find in almost the entire rest of the world, it represents a fully fledged wilderness overlaying the ruins of civilization; and this wilderness, one of the wildest in the hemisphere, covers the land in which human society scored its greatest achievements in the New World. We are so used to civilization overlaying the ruins of the wilderness that it is chastening to contemplate the opposite.

The abandoned *milpas* had come to an end and we were riding through the jungle. The trail was just wide enough for a car, but it had no bottom, for this was the rainy season, and the mules trod through pools of water and lakes of mud. In the worst places small logs had been laid together across the road to afford some kind of a footing. All about us were the abrupt mounds, several hundred feet high, that are the most obvious physical peculiarity of Petén. They have none of the rolling lines that characterize our hills, but rise abruptly out of the flat plain like so many gigantic anthills covered with jungle.

The road was now skirting one of these mounds. On our right the jungle rose steeply, with occasional cohune and botán palms flourishing their heads in the midst of it. Tom

and I were looking out for mahogany trees and Spanish cedar, but the jungle at that place was runty and there were few to be seen. Couch's kingbirds with pale yellow breasts perched on overhanging twigs and regularly voiced their soft and prolonged "breeps," occasionally sallying out after insect-prey with a breathless dash and flutter. From ahead came a noise of clamoring voices like the sound of a cheap old-fashioned radio-horn transmitting the cheers of a football-crowd to the accompaniment of static. It was a high-pitched clattering roar that increased as we approached until at last it was deafening. But even when we stopped our mules directly below the trees from which it came and peered intently into the massed foliage we could see no reason for it. Then one parrot rose and fluttered a little way off to another perch. After that we saw more, holding themselves motionless and peering back at us with hard yellow eyes. They were so nearly invisible against the green foliage that it might have been a matter of witchcraft. For they were not entirely green by any means. Across their nostrils was a brilliant scarlet band, their crowns were blue, and their cheeks a bright, solid yellow. I was tempted to say "Hello, María!" to the first I saw, in the expectation of being answered, for I had once owned one of this kind and the impulse to converse with a parrot had become an ingrained habit. This species is the commonest of the Amazon parrots in the Caribbean lowlands of Guatemala and throughout the Petén, and so trustful that, unlike most big parrots, it does not hesitate to feed in the trees and vines of your dooryard when you are moving about there yourself.

Now that Tom and I, on one side, and the parrots, on the other, had satisfied our mutual curiosity, both parties

began to move about freely again. The birds fluttered between branches and climbed below them to reach out for succulent prizes, while we set about belaboring our mules with sticks until they finally resumed the march.

It was getting toward that point in the afternoon when the daily display of waterworks could be expected, and it came on schedule. We hardly had time to get our ponchos on between its first appearance and its arrival. For about an hour the rain beat down on us and we gave all our attention to adjusting our ponchos so that the rivulets should remain on the outside. Then the rain stopped abruptly, on schedule again. Sunshine returned.

A little farther along the road we came across a pitiable sight. The General Motors station-wagon, with most of the signs of its newness still about it, was down on all fours in the middle of the trail and would not get up. The passengers were huddled inside, looking unhappy, while the driver, on the outside, was excavating for its wheels in the flowing mud. . . . Oh, joy of the machine-age! What is man, that he should question his own works? But the mules were horrified and balked, so that it was only after a severe contest that we got them to sidle by the monstrosity. Once past, I had to suppress an impulse to resurrect a bygone phrase and shout back, "Get a horse!" But I knew only too well how the driver felt. Even in the native habitat of the automobile, I might have told him on second thought, this sort of thing still sometimes happens. Courage! Out of your suffering will come great metaled highways upon which joy-riders and motorized troops can pass in a luxury that will forever remain unknown to you. But, though your name is forgotten and no bronze tablet will ever be erected at this spot where you have so richly paid for it, yet will you be

glorified in the hearts of your grateful successors. Pioneer, O Pioneer!

The original pace of the expedition had already fallen off, for the mules could do no more than walk through the thick soup in which they had to find their footing. As yet we had not come upon the savannas, but occasional glades along the way gave hope. We kept expecting them to begin, always, beyond the next bend. It was already after four o'clock when we came into a settlement consisting of eight or ten huts standing at intervals along the left side of the trail. It was called El Cimarrón—meaning The Unruly One, or, in a secondary sense, The Runaway Slave. Here we made our only halt for refreshments on the trip. Riding up to one of the huts, we called inside to the Señora, asking if she had coffee on the fire. In a moment she came out with two steaming cups and a little handful of warm tortillas. The Señor, too, came from behind the hut and we passed the time of day with him.

"Is it much farther to La Libertad?" we asked.

"You come from Flores, Señores?"

"Como no, Señor?" Where else did one come from?

"You are not yet halfway, in that case, Señores. You will not arrive at La Libertad before the night."

We downed our coffee, thanked him, and rode on. A few minutes later we emerged from the dark woods onto the savannas. The sunny grasslands stretched away before us, undulating almost imperceptibly, and enclosed on all sides by an archipelago of wooded islands. A line of small posts, bearing the single telegraph-wire to La Libertad, ran away over them, diminishing in the distance.

It was about this time that we fell in with a tall, spare

individual riding our way. We traveled with him, and yet not with him, for a couple of hours, like ships within the same horizon, aware of each other but exchanging no greeting. For now we were no longer confined to any one trail and could ride freely over a wide area. The stranger stood tall and stiffly erect in his stirrups; the jarring of the mule beneath him was lost before it reached his shoulders, which moved smoothly across the landscape. All three of us were keeping our beasts to that half-trot now, and it became a sort of unacknowledged contest between us to win the lead. When all were in single file, Tom and I would not be so discourteous as to pass the stranger, if he were leading at the time; and if he happened to be behind he remained there, for to pass at narrow quarters would be a sort of challenge that might bring the contest out into the open, as every American motorist will understand. But when we were spread out across the savanna it was a different matter. Here we would indulge in sprints, maneuvering to be in the lead, as if by accident, at the next defile. This was a fairly subtle matter, for one must urge one's mule on without too obviously belaboring him.

At no point on the savannas of Petén can one be entirely clear of the woods, and this is pleasant, for the most interesting and abundant wild-life is always that found about the forested edges of clearings. In the forest itself you can see hardly anything, even a parrot, unless it accidentally or deliberately exposes itself for an instant, and it is common to have the woods ringing with song or alarm overhead and not see even a movement of the foliage. To know the wild-life of the jungle one must dismount and have the patience to remain motionless in one spot by the hour,



despite all insects. Then, at last, the birds and beasts may come out of hiding and the empty shadowed places through which one rides become populated. In open grasslands, however, one can do no better than to ride, for there the trick is to stir up the hideouts. Here we had both forest and field within the same compass. All those conical hills were thickly and abruptly wooded, and they lay about in such profusion that sometimes they connected and formed long saw-tooth ridges against the sky. In addition, there were frequent sink-holes, slight circular hollows clogged with bush.

When I first came to the tropics, my greatest desire had been to know the spectacular life of the tall tropical jungle. Having fulfilled it, and having also flown high over these same savannas, I had for long since nourished a curiosity to know what kind of wild-life they, in turn, supported. Now, finding myself upon them at last, I was alert for discovery. Of course, I could not expect anything special from them, for they are neither ancient enough nor sufficiently extensive to possess the distinctive forms of life that inhabit the pampas of the Argentine or the African veldt, or that inhabited the Great Plains before the advent of civilization. Multiply their extent by some 'hundreds of thousands and let them stand for a million years: then, perhaps, you may find the ostriches, the bison, and the gazelles that now haunt your mind's eye.

It was immediately evident that the bird-life of the savannas fell naturally into two distinct categories. First, there were the typical jungle species that inhabited the wooded islands and were frequently to be seen crossing the open channels between them or heard calling from their

depths. Now that dusk was coming, the blue-headed parrots set up a great din, flying in large clattering flocks all about the horizon and sometimes passing overhead on the way to their rookeries. Occasionally other flocks made up of small, dark, white-fronted parrots raked close over the tree-tops like grapeshot. Chachalacas—a large fowl with a shrill cry—called and answered from grove to grove. The weird silhouettes of large toucans sometimes appeared, rowing themselves across the sky with periodic rests between wing-strokes. The natives call these birds with their grotesque, multi-colored bills “*picos reales*”—royal bills—but some earnest scientist who was chiefly interested in their internal skeletal characteristics has given them the vernacular English name of “short-keeled toucan,” thereby disproving the wild assertion that scientists are, after all, human.

These birds represented the species that were here despite the savannas, merely as natives of the Petén who asserted their squatter-sovereignty whatever the habitat. The second category embraces the birds that were in the savannas because open fields were their habitat, and despite the fact that the locality happened to be Petén. These were the cosmopolitan forms that may be found in almost any place where conditions are suitable. Thus we constantly heard the gently insistent voices of bob-whites complacently repeating their names to each other, and once or twice we flushed meadowlarks out of the grass—exactly as on the outskirts of Guatemala City or New York. Most of the flycatchers, which were everywhere abundant, also come into this category, as do the turkey vultures and the falcons.

In all this expanse of grasslands we came upon one

rancho, a little hut on the open plain with cattle grazing in the immediate vicinity. Two bearded men were standing in front of the hut, and we paused, ostensibly to ask how far we still were from La Libertad, but in reality more for the sake of the casual word in passing—for in the midst of this loneliness a human contact is an event.

After a couple of hours, the stranger in whose company we found ourselves was already less of a stranger. We began to know him, to recognize his individual peculiarities of manner and appearance as faintly familiar and appropriate. Who else, for example, could wear his hat in just that fashion?—obviously, no one else in the world! This is how one should make the acquaintance of strangers, by imperceptible degrees, rather than by having them forced into one's arms at first sight by an overly eager hostess at a dinner-party.

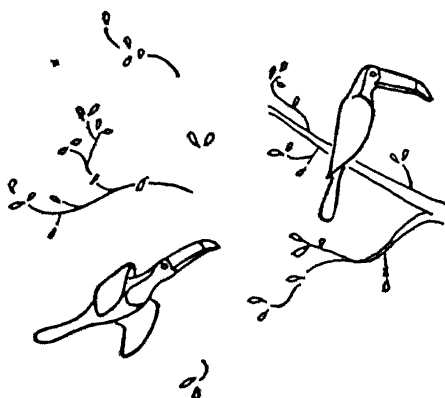
We already knew Mendez as the lean and silent sort, intelligent and friendly, but reserved, a man who never said anything but what he could have said more, had he chosen to. I don't believe any one of the three of us actually started the conversation. It was born of itself when the period of gestation had been completed. We learned his name and his present business, which was to return to his home in Sayaxché, on the Pasión River, after having been for a visit to Flores. Soon we were talking of our common acquaintances, a conversational gambit that is almost always possible in Petén, where in one of our large cities it is usually out of the question. We were carrying a bundle of photographs, taken by members of the Carnegie Institution expedition in the previous year, for delivery to three of the natives of Sayaxché who had served them as

boatmen. On inquiry, we learned that Hipólito Linga S. and Pablo Hernandez still lived in the settlement, but that Esteban Arellano had since moved elsewhere. Mendez had been guide for the Carnegie expedition in the exploration of one site on the river, and he was not at all surprised that we knew its members. After all, we too came from North America.

By now the sky had grown dusky and we had for some time been in the woods again, riding along a broad, straight avenue whose sole pavement was the virgin mud. The first stars came out and we began looking for the appearance of La Libertad ahead of us any minute. Below a certain stage—usually about two leagues—the Guatemalan ceases to reckon distances, and all inquiries elicit the same answer, "*Allí no más!*" given with a wave of the hand. Now, whenever we asked Mendez how much farther we had to go, he made the customary gesture and said, "Just there, no more!" But it was another hour before we arrived. A thin white mist had formed over the ground and, the heat of the day having at last been broken, the atmosphere was suddenly fresh, with just enough moisture in it to hold the wet odor of grass and foliage. The vicinity of the village was heralded by night-wandering horses and cattle, in groups of two or three, that loomed suddenly out of the misty dark, startling us by their silence. One had to listen to catch the sound of chewing and snuffling.

It had turned full night, with all the stars out, when we came to the first huts. The village was not asleep yet, but not altogether awake either it seemed. Voices came softly from inside the dwellings as we rode past, and the lights of the cooking-fires had fallen to a glow. Mules and cattle,

dimly apparent in the darkness, stood about in the open, moving slowly aside to let us pass. Mendez showed us to the house of Don Alfredo Taintor and left us there. Two hours later our *arrieros* arrived with the pack-mule.





#### CHAPTER IV

WE TETHERED OUR MULES and walked stiffly to the doorway of the little house, not on our legs, it seemed, but on sticks of wood. The light of a kerosene lantern inside shone through the door against the barrier of mist. A small man in a stained shirt was sitting at supper in a characteristic attitude, sideways to the table, his right elbow resting on its edge, a fork carelessly suspended in his hand while he talked to a mestizo woman standing before him.

"*Está Don Alfredo Taintor?*" we interrupted from the doorway.

"*Si está. Yo soy. . .*" Don Alfredo looked up at us questioningly. We introduced and explained ourselves, and he promptly took us in hand, deserting his supper to lead us out by the back of the house to an adjoining house in which we should make our home. This second house consisted of two rooms, one a huge storeroom opening through large double doors in front and in back. Its broad expanses of whitewashed wall had several stained paper prints affixed to them, lost in the surrounding emptiness like so many

postage-stamps. One, I remember, showed a double rank of vignettes divided by decorative scrolls: on the left a rake's progress from irreligion to drunkenness, on the right the advancement of piety to the final bliss of a large and prospering family. Burlap sacks of corn were stowed about the corners of the room and along the sides. A round table and a couple of rocking-chairs stood alone in the middle of the cement floor.

With nothing to do till our baggage arrived, we sat about and talked by the light of a single lamp that illuminated only a part of the room, like little boys hatching conspiracies at night in the seclusion of a deserted barn. Don Alfredo was smaller than I had pictured him to myself, but not otherwise different. His smallness was all in good proportion, except for a pair of old-time military mustaches with a touch of bristling banditry about them. These were parted enough in the middle to make a round hole for the cigarette that he puffed continually. His face, behind the mustaches, was narrow and bony, his brown hair lank and showing signs of some original arrangement for parting it on one side. He sat down on a corn-sack and with a gesture left us the two rockers, which we welcomed eagerly after seven hours in the saddle.

Doubtless Alfred Taintor would be surprised at some of the tales that keep up his fame in Guatemala City. He was never there for more than a brief visit, and not even for that in over twenty years. But his name is well known, and I had heard it spoken repeatedly ever since the days of my first arrival in Central America. He was, I gathered, a sort of omnipotent monarch on the savannas of Petén, and a fabulous hunter of jaguars who bred dogs especially

for the purpose. When, in 1936, a jaguar cub arrived by airplane for the Guatemala zoo, with the compliments of Don Alfredo, it was more the name of the donor than the natural ferocity of the beast that aroused awe. The main story went that Taintor had first come to Guatemala as a gunman for a former president, Don Estrada Cabrera, and had fled into Petén on Cabrera's downfall.

This much is actually true of him: he has been a great hunter of jaguars in his day, and he was, in a qualified sense, a gunman for Don Estrada. Though he is not quite an old man yet, by the index of his years, he has for so long been retired from adventure that he is already independently ancient; just as a ship that has rotted at one berth for ten winters is old though she has been launched less than a dozen years. Today there is a marked aura of decay about the old man. His teeth are mostly gone, tiger-hunting is over, and there remains only a growing obsession with three dilapidated Ford cars for which all his other interests are now neglected.

If you want his actual age you can deduce it from the fact that he was seventeen at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, when he enlisted in the American army. History is mute on the earlier years. His birth was in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. After his enlistment he served as an infantry private in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. That spell of soldiering did for him what it has done for others, it spoiled him for an ordinary life (presumably that of an Oklahoma farmer, in his case) and when his discharge came he and an unstated number of other unemployed soldiers formed a gang and offered their united services to the first bidder, whosoever he might be. They began by getting in touch with the revolutionary



movement of General Bondilla in Venezuela and schemed to make their way secretly to that country to help him overthrow the government and reap the reward. Taintor and another sneaked a train-ride to New Orleans, where they were met by two more of the gang. But the United States Secret Service discovered their conspiracy against a friendly neighboring government just as they were about to board a boat, so they were forced to clear out of New Orleans in a hurry and lie in hiding for a while. They remained in Louisiana, however, taking various temporary jobs and keeping in touch with one another.

Time passed, and Taintor was working steadily in the cab of a locomotive. Finally, in 1904, Estrada Cabrera, then dictator of Guatemala, sent the gang an invitation to come down and help him keep order. They went, five at a time. From 1904 to 1907, Taintor was stationed in Gualán and Zacapa, on the railway-line from Puerto Barrios, with a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars a month and nothing to do except parade a gun and keep his eyes open. In the latter year, evidently feeling politically secure enough by that time to dispense with Don Alfredo's military services, President Cabrera sent him into the Petén to locate mahogany trees, agreeing to give him a third interest in each one he located. He has been there ever since.

It would be interesting to know what finally happened to the other soldiers of fortune with whom Taintor was originally associated. He, himself, stands out as one of the successes. By 1907, when he became the president's partner in the mahogany business, he must already have been a well-to-do man, for it is hard to see how he could have spent much of his salary in the primitive villages in which he was stationed. From mahogany he naturally drifted into

chicle, and became the local manager for one of the big American chicle companies. Another time he was the partner of an American ornithologist whose subsequent quarrel with the Guatemalan government became an international cause célèbre, and has since been chronicled in a large and tedious official publication. Taintor was out of that, however, for he had already quarreled with the ornithologist and broken his partnership before the crisis. Today he is a well-to-do breeder of mules and cattle in La Libertad.

Once only, since 1907, has Don Alfredo been away from Petén, and that was in 1927, when the chicle company for which he was manager sent him to New York for a brief vacation. The entire visit was spent in Coney Island, and if the old tiger-hunter someday goes to a heaven of his choice that will be it. He still greatly admires the Bowery, which comes second to Coney Island in his estimation, but he found it sadly fallen off since the days of his youth.

History will not be able to credit Taintor with the first importation of the automobile into Petén, though he is undoubtedly its chief pioneer. The actual first, a truck, was brought in by the manager of a chicle camp called Paso Caballo, northwest of the lake, in the days before the first airplane had arrived. It came overland through the untrammelled jungle from the Caribbean coast of British Honduras, and was altogether two years in the coming. A path had to be cleared ahead of it, and it was dragged from tree to tree by means of ropes and an improvised winch operated under its own power. Since its arrival it has rotted quietly in a shed especially built to shelter it, and there it rots today. Spare parts were not obtainable in the Petén.

Don Alfredo's Fords came in later. They were flown

piecemeal to Flores, sometime after 1930; for before that time the airplane itself had not come to Petén. One must remember that Taintor looks at the automobile with the eyes of 1904; to him it is still a wonderful novelty. I don't know whether he also imported a mechanic to assemble his Fords after their arrival, or whether he did it himself; but I doubt the former, for he has the rugged, independent, and pertinacious spirit that the pioneering life and the automobile alike demand. Tom, who is by way of being an amateur of internal-combustion engines, reported that his repair-work was entirely hit-or-miss. When something was wrong and the cause was not immediately apparent, he attacked it by repairing everything in sight. Every little gadget, tube, pipe, and wire was taken out and put back in again, screws were unscrewed and rescrewed, levers were twisted and untwisted, bits of string and broken match-sticks were attached or inserted wherever a place could be found for them. The treatment was similar to that once accorded Cortés's horse, Morcillo, by the ancient and worshipful Itzás—but more successful, for it sometimes worked.

This, in brief summary, is Taintor's life now, as we observed it. At six in the morning he is out in the shed behind his house, with one or two of his cowboys for assistants, tinkering with the insides of one or the other of his three pets. His old woman, as he calls her, is in the smoke-filled cook-house with two or three girls, a parakeet, and a monkey, keeping the fire going against the time when nature reminds him that he has had no breakfast—usually about ten o'clock. The rest of the day is spent in the same fashion, and sometimes the work goes on into the dark hours by the light of a solitary lantern. From time to time an assistant goes to the nose of the patient and spins the crank.

Whenever he manages to evoke a sustained sputter, as sometimes happens, Don Alfredo climbs into the front seat and goes off somewhere, either to the lake or across the savannas to Paso Subín. With luck, he returns as he came, otherwise on foot. In any case, there are always more repairs to exercise his ingenuity, and so he grows gradually older. The tigers that once knew him as their ruthless enemy have much to be thankful for in the advent of the automobile-age to Petén.

Towards his new competition, the General Motors station-wagon, Don Alfredo's attitude may be described, in a word, as contemptuous. He sees in it only a pitiful attempt to provoke him, but he points out that the wheel-base and clearance are entirely unsuited to the local environment. The owner is a fool.

It was evident, when Don Alfredo talked, that his mustaches hid the absence of all his front teeth. Otherwise his speech was basically what one might guess that of a farmer of the Indian Territory before the turn of the century to have been, though it had its own explosive individuality. He would slap his knee at each memory that particularly delighted him, when he was reminiscing to us, and in recounting anecdotes out of his past he always had other people addressing him as "old-timer." We began by presenting the photographs of himself that the Carnegie explorers had commissioned us to give him, but he showed no more than a perfunctory interest in them. The conversation languished when we talked about these common acquaintances, whom he had already half forgotten. What he wanted to hear about, and to tell about in turn, was Coney Island.

The three of us moved to the next room for a supper of fried eggs, black beans, and tortillas, and continued our conversation there. This room, also running the depth of the house, but narrower than its neighbor, was divided by a wall of chicken-wire into an "office," at the front, and a "dining-room" in back. The office was like a second-hand shop, piled high with old guns, cord, rope, tools, the wreckage of an old-fashioned gramophone, and all sorts of nondescript and undefinable bric-a-brac. This was the graveyard of everything that had, in the course of twenty years, got beyond repair. The dining-room had a small square table and several wooden chairs, the table betraying signs of past meals that might also have aroused an antiquary. One bit of fried egg that went overboard at that first meal was there at our last, dirty, by then, and somewhat shriveled. It is probably still there, unless the flies have, in the meantime, removed it piecemeal.

The *arrieros* arrived with the pack-mule after supper and we were not long in unpacking. The next move was to suspend our hammocks by the long hammock-ropes that hung from iron rings near the top of either wall. Tom, who is longer of stature than the average, sat down gingerly on the edge of his hammock and began to study the problem of how he could dispose his length in it with security. From the depths of mine, I began a brief discourse on the abstract and theoretical aspects of the problem. I explained how the human body, stretched lengthwise in a hammock, naturally falls into a concave posture, while crosswise the converse or convex position is assumed. Thus, I pointed out, any practical solution of the problem must of necessity be in the nature of a compromise. At some point be-

tween the two extremes was the ideal flatness. *Id est*, one must lie diagonally across the hammock.

Tom tried and failed. Whenever he pulled his legs in after him and began bouncing and squirming in an effort to correct his position the hammock would unaccountably go out from under and he would have to get his feet back to the ground in a hurry. This went on for some time. He attacked the hammock again and again, like an army assaulting an impregnable stronghold. He grunted and swore softly—with admirable restraint at first. I left off giving advice, for it was important to keep his friendship in view of what was ahead of us. The match went on in silence now, except for heavy breathing, occasional grunts, and guttural monosyllables. Finally, after five minutes, he called a recess and sat down on the edge of the hammock, his feet on the floor. "It won't work," he said quietly, and with an air of vast resignation. "It's no use."

"You're too tall," I said. "That makes it harder."

"I don't like to think of all those nights ahead of us."

"Oh, you'll get used to it, all right! You'll prefer it to a bed."

I was right, and I recall now how both of us, when we reached Tenosique, searched for places to hang our hammocks because the beds there, our first in weeks, were not to our liking.



So few mosquitoes were in evidence on the dry savannas that we had no occasion to use our wonderful *pabellónes*

at La Libertad. However, bearing in mind my bitter experience in northern Petén and reminding myself that one could not be too careful, it occurred to me on our last evening in the village that we should have one of them out and put it to the test before we had finally entered the domain of the mosquito. The original luxury-pabellón, bought in New York City and scientifically designed by a specialist, was removed from its cellophane wrapping and slipped over my hammock. But something was wrong! Its two side-walls, instead of hanging straight down from the edge of its ceiling in orthodox fashion, hung flat against each other in the middle so that, seen from one end, the whole thing had the shape of a T, the hammock making a bulge in the center of the upright. And that was not all that was wrong, for the walls stopped a full foot short of the ground. Of course, there was the drawstring about the bottom edge, something no pabellón ever had before, but when that was drawn tight, with someone in the hammock, it merely encircled the hammock and left its lower part bulging through for a mosquito-feast. We fidgeted and fussed for several minutes, unwilling to face the appalling truth. But there was no avoiding it. The whole contraption, the design itself, was quite unworkable! Of course, it was the same story with the two other pabellónes, which had been made up for us in Guatemala City after the scientific design of the first.

I admit to a moment of panic at our discovery. I foresaw whole weeks of nights like that first on the trail to Uaxactún, this time in the company of an innocent fellow-sufferer whose groans would rend my conscience. All this we were spared. Taintor, hurriedly called on the scene,

finally saved us by canvassing the members of his household, from whom he obtained two more-or-less normal *pabellónes*. One of these, that looked as if it had been dipped in iodine, was of solid linen, so heavy that it shut out almost all light as well as all air. This one, I said, should be mine, my cross to bear for having blundered over the most important single item in the equipment of the tropical camper. Tom gallantly offered to share it with me, taking it on alternate nights, but I refused to hear of it. I would have fought him sooner than give up my cross, for I was now firmly resolved that I should be punished.

The physical aspect of La Libertad, with all the wide savannas to sprawl in, is a full contrast to flood-bound Flores. The little village spreads out thin to look as big as it can. Each thatched adobe hut stands lonely in the midst of its fruit trees, and the avenues of trampled grass and dung are everywhere broad enough for a good-sized cattle roundup. Taintor's house faces across a large village-green toward a plaster church that is kept locked except when, once or twice a year, the priest from Flores comes to spend a day baptizing and marrying the villagers, cleansing them of original and acquired sin. On one side, between the church and Taintor's, is a house occupied by a pious woman who gathers up the village children and teaches them hymns, so that all morning and all afternoon the thin treble disharmony of their mingled voices floats across the green. Behind Taintor's dwelling are some enclosures in which he keeps a few mules and, separated from the rest, a notable jackass whose unceasing and strident complaints at being fenced-off from female companionship take the place of



radio in this backward community. Behind these, again, is a lane, one hut, and then the boundless savanna reaching out to the southern horizon.

During the day the village-green is deserted. Late in the afternoon, however, it becomes a temporary parade-ground for the garrison of six soldiers that shares one side of it with the pious woman. The signal for the change is the beating of a little drum inside the *comandancia*, and a moment later the six, accompanied by the drum, come out marching. They are barefooted, wearing faded blue denim uniforms with peaked caps. From the doorway they march straight out for about ten feet, the drum a-rat-tat-tat-tatting, halt, face left to a long roll from the drum, and march again, the drum now repeating a single beat in rhythm to the marching. At the end of the pious lady's house they halt once more, the drum rolls, left turn, and again forward march—past our doorway and then Taintor's. At last, having made the circuit of the green, they come back to the *comandancia*, execute their maneuver, and march indoors with their drum. For the rest of the day they lounge in the shade of its porch. Tom and I had only one encounter with them, and that was when we unwittingly disobeyed the regulation that no civilian may walk by within twenty feet of their quarters. This was explained to us and we avoided a repetition of the offense.

Toward sunset the cattle begin to wander in to the village-green from the surrounding savannas of their own accord. They do this for security against the jaguars and cougars that roam the open country at night and eat veal when they can get it. But it not infrequently happens that an especially bold or hungry jaguar will come in for his

dinner on the village-green itself. The cattle are never in a hurry about taking up their nocturnal quarters. Slowly the avenues leading to the green become populated with their numbers, deep lowings and occasional bellows give notice of their approach. They walk forward deliberately for ten or twelve steps, swinging their heads, then hesitate, roll their great eyes in fear, and come to a halt. Some are always walking, while most remain motionless, awaiting further orders. Occasionally there is promise of a fight, but it is never fulfilled. Some cow with a calf tosses her horns in the direction of an adjacent cow, who lowers her head to meet the challenge, thinks better of it, and runs away for two or three panic-stricken steps before regaining her normal bovine tranquillity. A particularly respected elder among the bulls makes the other bulls give ground to him grudgingly, but without any overt clash. One animal there always is who stretches his nose out straight before him at quarter-minute intervals, opens his drooling jaws, and utters such long-drawn sorrow that one would think he was expressing in one concentrated exclamation all the accumulated grief of generations. So, bemoaning their fate, prodded on from behind by late-comers, responding to the inexorable doom of their species, they gradually congregate on the village-green, till by nightfall they stand flank to flank over its whole broad expanse, chewing their pre-destinated cuds.

As the night wears on most of them settle to the ground, as if at last giving up for good the futile martyrdom of their existence. Their moans become gradually weaker and more intermittent. But there is always mysterious movement in the dark, and occasionally the deep hours of the

night are startled by an explosive bellow. Tom and I made the mistake of keeping our front door open for ventilation the first night, and on awakening simultaneously to one such bellow we found an ugly bull standing with his head in our room.

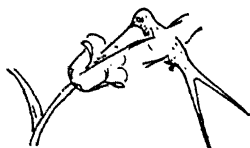
Altogether we spent four days at La Libertad, impartially dividing our working-time between the two sciences of archaeology and ornithology. The ornithology had been embarrassing to us in our preparations for the expedition, it was an embarrassment on the expedition itself, it is something of an embarrassment to me now as I recall it. Because the bird-life of the Usumacinta region is unknown to science, we had with great simplicity suggested to the ornithologists of the Harvard Museum that while we were down that way we might pick up a few birds to bring back, much as if birds were seashells. When we began to make preparations for collecting, we learned of our mistake. We estimated that we could not bring back a collection of any value at all without spending something like fifty or sixty hours in the field at the arduous task of preparing skins alone. But the museum's staff had meanwhile put us under a double obligation by the generosity with which they gave up their time to our preparations and by their outspoken doubt that archaeologists could bring back anything of value to ornithology. The moral commitment became an incubus that haunted our sleep. Finally we agreed between us that we would if we could, and if we couldn't we wouldn't.

The morning after our arrival we took up our guns and marched out on the savanna as the sun was rising. We

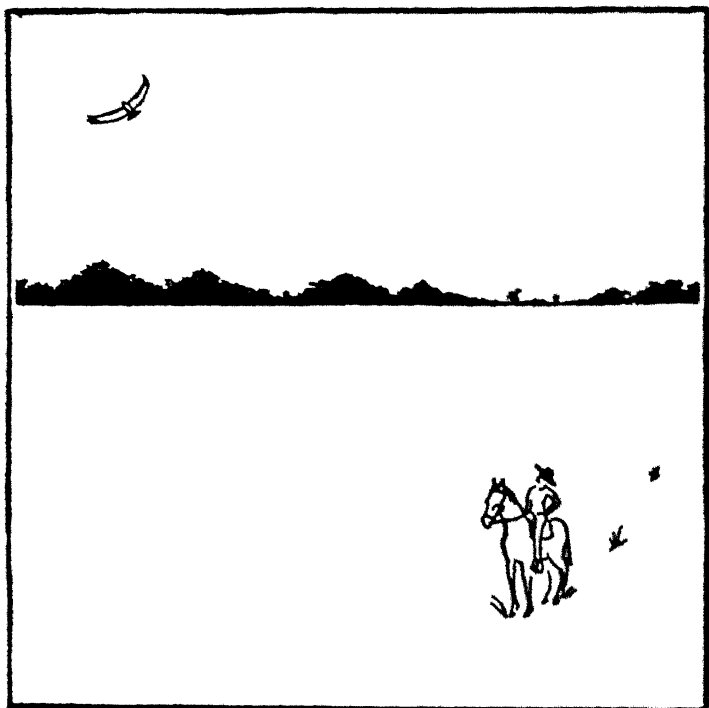
followed the cattle-paths that ran over the cropped grass to a little water-hole completely hidden by shrubbery about a quarter of a mile southwest of the village. Pigeons cooed at us, hummingbirds dazzled us as they darted across the water, a pair of toucans in the top of a tree kissed with their great bills and paid no attention to us whatsoever. Shooting the birds was so easy for Tom that, after several misses on my part, I was glad to resign myself to the role of his gun-boy. Whenever we spotted a bird that was in a properly exposed position and not perched over shrubbery too dense to enter, we went into conference with ourselves and debated whether its skin would be of value to science. On our return to the village, we had exactly four birds in our bag. One was a hummingbird—a rich black-velvet creation ornamented with emerald sequins and carrying a long, deeply forked tail, like a miniature bird of paradise. I skinned this first, cherishing it the most, but it was so nearly microscopic and I so little expert that half its jeweled feathers were transferred to my fingers before I was through. This was discouraging. The others in the bag were a pigeon, a strange woodpecker, and a black perching-bird. The pigeon, it turned out, was a mere squab, its flight and tail feathers not quite all the way down yet, and since a touch was enough to dislodge them we merely put it in the larder for lunch.

Another day we went out and collected four more birds, including another specimen of the pigeon, but of the older generation. That night we set all our birdskins out on a board to dry, placing them safely above the reach of animal marauders, as we thought, and in the morning there were only a few stray feathers left us for all our pains.

This concludes the section on the ornithological achievements of our expedition, a topic that will not be brought up again in this report.



Nevertheless, this remains the chapter of our humiliations; though I think we can attribute the failure of our archaeological investigations to sheer bad luck. There were two sites near La Libertad that we wanted to visit. At the ruins of Polol we had in mind investigating a certain causeway to determine whether it continued out onto the savanna to the north. At Chakantún we wanted, if possible, to make ground-plans of some of the many ruined house-platforms we expected to find there. This was all simple enough and not very important. We set out to explore both sites on our second day at La Libertad, guided by two of Don Alfredo's cowboys. Mounted on sturdy mules, our machetes at our sides, we started off at a brisk trot along the path to the water-hole. One of the guides, a lanky, good-natured, and extremely diffident mestizo, was taking the occasion to break in a new mule to riding and had to be towed along by a halter-rope which the other held. In a quarter of an hour we had passed the edge of the grazed land and were already in the deep-grass savanna. Fork-tailed flycatchers described indescribable whirls and loops over our heads, swerving with a swiftness and grace that seemed deliberately spectacular, their long tails streaming. Couch's kingbirds and "kiskadee" flycatchers made



brief sallies into the sky and settled back to their perches. Grasshopper sparrows (never before recorded as residents of Guatemala) called from the grass on every side. This was the kind of tropical exploration I had a mind for. Instead of tunneling through dark jungle, our mules sinking above their hocks in mud at each step, we trotted easily over a land of waving grass as flat as a table, occasionally bringing our mules to a gallop for the sheer zest of it. The pale golden grasslands were framed by the dark forests of the limestone mounds, and once we had to thread our way across a little neck of forest between savannas. Elsewhere there were islets of vegetation formed by sinkholes and,

in the open grass, occasional palms or hardwood trees standing individually.

At one point we were startled by what we took for some species of wildcat confronting us in the path, but when it turned and fled in long bounds through the grass it displayed an unmistakable fox's brush. Once again, a little later, this species of fox, the "*gato del monte*," justified its name of wood-cat by our mistake.

The radiant heat of the savannas was already intense when we reached Polol, at the end of an hour and five minutes. We passed a little water-hole that looked like a mirage and beyond it came to the one-family establishment that constitutes the entire settlement. It was merely a lone hut in the midst of a grove of citrus trees. Here the woods closed in at last, for this was the western extremity of the savannas.

An old Indian woman came from the hut at our approach and, in answer to our inquiries, confessed that she had no knowledge of the location of the ruins we were seeking. Her husband, Don Ernesto, would know, but he was at his *milpa*, far away in the forest—oh, very far away! Our guides thought they could find the ruins themselves, however, so we left our mounts tethered under the trees and set off on foot across the field to the edge of the woods. These woods were the densest kind of growth, abandoned *milpa* scrubland, and they guarded their archaeological treasure effectively against our intrusion. We cut our way foot by foot through the dense tangle, stooping low and retrieving our hats from the thorns overhead at every few steps. The atmosphere was that of a ship's boiler-room on a summer's day, and after a few minutes our semi-quadruped position became a form of torture. The guides evi-

dently had some idea of what they were doing, for several times we retreated along our burrow for a short distance and then branched off in another direction. At the end of half an hour our machetes suddenly discovered an upright stone stela, about three feet high, without any inscriptions or sculpture.

"Well, this is it," said Tom, crouching over it. "Now all that's missing is a causeway."

In another half-hour the men admitted that they were lost. But now we seemed to be in the vicinity of some long, low mounds—at any rate, the ground became abruptly more uneven—so we continued the search and a few minutes later uncovered two broken stones, this time with faint traces of their original inscriptions and sculptured figures still showing, but so badly eroded that we could make nothing of them. They afforded good seats, however, and we used them as such. I offered to sit quietly right there and not disturb Tom for however long it might take him to find the causeway, but he refused to leave me. After a few minutes we held a conference at which we decided that it was useless to go on in this way. So we returned through our tunnel till at last we stood upright once more, praising and glorifying the Lord, at the edge of the open savanna.

Our next move was to go in search of Don Ernesto and invoke his guidance. But the old woman no more knew how to get to his *milpa* than she did the direction of the ruins. All she could tell us was that it was far, far away, off in the woods, somewhere. She mistrusted us, I think, and was purposely vague. So there was nothing left to do but to give up Polol and go on to the ruins of Chakantún, which, we recalled with relief, were scattered on the savanna.



"Chakantún?" the men asked. "What is Chakantún?"

"Didn't Don Alfredo tell you we were going on to Chakantún after visiting the ruins of Polol?"

No, he did not. He had not breathed a word to them about any such plans, he had not whispered a hint! Moreover, such a place had never been heard of. We described the site as best we could: south of La Libertad, halfway on the road to Paso Subín, many ancient stones scattered on the savanna. They knew nothing about it, had never heard of it, doubted its existence even. "*Muy bien*," I said with resignation. "Let us return to La Libertad. From there Don Alfredo will direct us, if there is yet time. Now let us go as quickly as possible."

Don Alfredo had a better plan to offer when we arrived. On the day of our departure for Paso Subín, our destination after La Libertad, he would drive us to Chakantún, in one of his Fords, early enough so that we could spend the afternoon there and still have time to reach Paso Subín by nightfall. This was simplicity itself.



Simplicity itself! We would leave for the Chakantún ruins, by automobile, at sharp midday, not a moment later. We went about repeating it to each other—not a moment

later, not a moment later! After several hours of archaeology we would proceed, by automobile, to Paso Subín, on a tributary of the Pasión, where the boatmen we had ordered from Sayaxché were due to meet us that same evening. It was planned. We had, so to speak, decreed it. But we had reckoned without the inscrutable destiny that, in these latter years, brooded over the person of our host. Quite unexpectedly, about ten o'clock on the morning of our departure, the engine of the Model-T Ford over which Don Alfredo had been sweating came to life, and Don Alfredo, as was his custom, as was his fate, climbed into the driver's seat and started off. Half an hour later, seeing him nowhere about and inquiring for him from one of his boys, we learned that he had already departed for Paso Subín. He had left word that he would be back by one-thirty, by one-thirty at the very latest.

At one-thirty Don Alfredo had not yet appeared, nor at two-thirty. We sat in our rocking-chairs and read, keeping one eye on the chickens that, circling warily about us, tried to approach one sack of corn in which they had already made a hole. We would let them get right up to it, then leap from our chairs with loud whoops and waving arms, sending them racing out the doors at both ends. Tom, in a fit of black pessimism, embarked on the first of the nine hundred and seventy-five pages of "The Brothers Karamazov."

At quarter past three Don Alfredo arrived, limping pitifully. He had walked ten and a half miles back over the hot savannas from where he had left the car with one of its front wheels broken off neatly at the axle. And he was almost hopping on one leg, when we saw him, the other having given out on him. But after a hurried lunch he got

out the Model-A touring-car, which had been put in working-order the day before, and the three of us climbed into the front seat. Then he pointed her south across the waving sea of grass and let her have her head.

The thrill of that ride is hard to account for. Perhaps it was partly the fact that, having already adjusted our minds to the pace of the mule, we were realizing, as if it were a fresh wonder, the sensation of skimming space at twenty-five and thirty miles-per-hour without an effort, seeing the grasses vanish like running water at either side, feeling the wind buffet through the open windshield. Certainly it was in large part the landscape, for here the savannas were more open, and the wooded, saw-tooth hills stood away off on the horizon. Under the sunlight the pale yellow grass turned white where breezes combed over it. Not the least share of the credit must go to the simple fact that we had finally come to expect that we would not get away at all that day. The afternoon rain swooped down on us suddenly, like a bird, taking us by surprise however much we had expected it. It lashed the car furiously for a few minutes, battering into our faces. Then it flew off again, somewhere else, and the sunlight came out over the dripping grass.

To the naked eye, most of the ruins called Chakantún are not recognizable as such at all. It takes imagination to see in the white stones scattered over the plain the remains of an ancient settlement of human folk. They seem far more likely than the limestone mounds to be purely geological. And they extend for miles in every direction. At last we came to several mounds, overgrown with grass and stunted trees, probably the foundations for long-vanished

wooden temples. We had time to march up one mound and down again, like a legendary king of France, with an additional minute to examine one group of stones and note that they were in roughly oval formation with solid projections at either end—an utterly useless piece of scientific information, like an isolated statistic. Again we sped over the savannas.

A few minutes later the grasslands came to an end and we entered the jungle. Here was a road of sorts, but obviously impassable. At best it was thick mud, and every few minutes we dipped sharply down into a long lake. Half a mile down the road we came on the Model-T, her nose pointing south, one wheel buckled flat against the ground under her, and stopped to take on Taintor's most cherished engineering assistant, a boy whose teeth were so badly deformed that he spoke partly in signs, accompanied by noises that belonged to no language on earth. His signs and his sounds at our appearance, however, left no doubt as to his meaning. He was urgently hungry, having spent all the time since the breakdown clearing another road through the jungle by which we could pass the wreck. We passed it, and at the first hint of dusk rode into Paso Subín.





## CHAPTER V

SOMEWHERE, THAT AFTER-noon, we had crossed the invisible boundary between one world and another. The village of La Libertad, bestriding the prostrate savannas, still has about it the atmosphere of human permanence and human security; it is definitely on top, the kind of place cartographers may write down on their maps and underscore. By contrast, Paso Subín cringes; it is a settlement rather than a village, it exists darkly and on tolerance, at best, under the overshadowing jungle trees that probably have not noticed it yet. When they do, one feels, they will only have to shake their branches once or twice till the big limbs growl, and the intrusive community of six pole-shelters will collapse at their feet. Then, one step at a time, like the giants of mythology, they will reoccupy the clearing that is theirs by right. Men survive here as do the mice that nest between the roots, they make themselves as small as possible for fear of being seen.

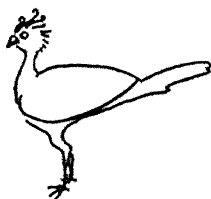
To the civilized man this is not exactly frightening, but it puts him on his guard. He is not used to surroundings that are so darkly ominous, and he is not used to humbling

himself. If he were elsewhere he might feel that there was enough threat in the atmosphere to justify calling out the police. Where he comes from he is not accustomed to having to put up with such a thing. The natives, on the other hand, who have lived thus all their lives and know nothing of the police, have more humility. They are definitely cowed.

"Look here," says the civilized man, "we ought to do something about this! I don't like it one bit!"

"Sh . . . !" whispers the native. "Not so loud! Walk quietly, talk quietly, always. Maybe we won't get caught after all."

"But—but . . . It's an outrage! The government . . ." And then he remembers: he has crossed the frontier, he is now a trespasser and beyond help of the law.



The Arroyo Subín cannot properly be called either a river or a brook. In size it is intermediate, small enough for the trees to touch overhead, deep enough to prevent babbling. It steals through the oppressive and muffling vegetation of the jungle with Indian stealth, moving fast but making no unnecessary noise. At one point the bank has been cleared for a couple of hundred yards and a half dozen thatched huts with picket walls shelter the population of Paso Subín. There must be a trail that debouches from the jungle opposite, for in the evening six little Indian

men suddenly appeared on the far bank and a dugout was sent gliding obliquely across to fetch them. In Indian file they climbed up the bank, their bodies bent under the enormous burdens on their backs, their eyes to the ground. Each step they took was made with deliberation and effort, slowly. They wore little straw hats and woolen aprons.

"From where do these Indians come?" we inquired.

"From Cobán," was the answer. They were Kekchís from the highlands of the Alta Vera Paz, and had been fifteen days traversing the unbroken forest of southern Petén to sell the wares on their backs in La Libertad and Flores. These *achineros*, these Indian peddlers, were doing exactly what their ancestors had been doing a thousand, fifteen hundred, two thousand years ago, in the selfsame fashion; only their ancestors were coming to trade in the rich and populous metropolis of Central America, in the great civic centers of Tayasal, Tikal, Uaxactún, a thriving land of roads, farms, temples, and palaces; not in Flores and La Libertad.

At the top of the bank they lowered themselves to the ground and got out from under their burdens, which had been suspended by tump-lines to their foreheads. They drew inwards upon themselves in a circle, squatting on their heels and smiling their furtive Oriental smiles, as if it embarrassed them to be observed. Soon they had a campfire burning in the center of their circle and were cooking the evening meal. They murmured together gently in Indian language, much, I suppose, as stone-age men murmured about the campfires of Asia a hundred thousand years ago. The time would come when man could stand up straight and talk out loud on the face of the earth, but not yet, not yet. Meanwhile—move gently, hush and lurk.

In the morning, while it was still dark, we saw them bend beneath their loads and move off silently once more toward the north.

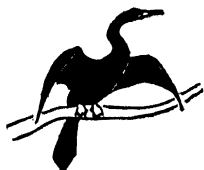
Our boatmen, Alberto Moro, *patrón*, and Jaime Fernandez (called Epifanio for short) were also gentle men, if less furtive than the Indians. They were half-breeds in every sense, neither one thing nor the other, without race or past. No one will ever know who their ancestors were and what they were doing even two hundred years ago, let alone two thousand. Alberto, for example, was not a Negro, but he was still as much that as anything else. He was not a civilized man, according to the standards by which Tom and I are civilized, but he was not like the Indians. He was indefinable, nondescript, a bit of flotsam detached from the shores of civilization and drifting out into the wilderness. In figure he was tall, for a tropical American, and wiry. His features were basically negroid, but very much softened and, so to speak, veiled by Indian and white influences.

But it is impossible to write of Alberto as if he were only so much architecture. I think of him with amusement and affection. He had a childlike good humor that was always outspoken—but gently outspoken, not with any boisterousness. There, again, you have the strange combination. Paddling us down the river, he used to do what I think no fully native American would ever do in the circumstances: he sang songs. But in a soft voice and with a certain smiling diffidence. A native of Sayaxché, on the *Pasión*, he had a woman and several children there—I have forgotten how many. But his woman was from Tenosique in Mexico, on the *Usumacinta*, and having lately expressed a



longing to return to her home, Alberto planned to take her and the children down the river as soon as he had finished with us. Then, when he returned again to Sayaxché, he would have to find himself another woman. Like everything else, it was a great joke.

Alberto Moro was the capitalist of the enterprise, the owner of the transport *Lucicita*, a mahogany dugout. Epifanio Fernandez was a *voga*, or boatman. A Cobanero (from Cobán) by birth and upbringing, he had, according to his story, been drafted into the national police and stationed in Flores. At the end of his term of service he had drifted down to Sayaxché, and for some reason he could not return to Cobán, though he longed to. A fair proportion of the men who live along these rivers are outlaws, usually more by chance than by nature; a machete wielded in drunkenness or desperation may be responsible for their living beyond the pale of the law. But Epifanio was, again, the very soul of gentleness. Probably it was merely that he had not completed his term of service with the police. Unlike Alberto, he was squarely built, powerful but not tall. His race was the future race of Central America, the mestizo, a fusion of white and Indian stock. Everyone liked Epifanio for his soft speech and good manners, and wherever we stopped he was known and welcome.



No hour in the day or night is so pagan as that between cockcrow and dawn. It is Pan's own hour. Even in the

north, outside of cities, this is an enlightened and monotheistic world only for twenty-three hours of the day.

At cockcrow, when Tom and I turned on our flashlights inside our *pabellónes* and began fumbling for our boots on the earth-floor, the stars were shining with assurance outside and there was no sign of dawn. When we came out onto the river-bank it was still eternal night, with the river just audible, but howling monkeys down river were already roaring, or moaning. Softly at first. The endless earth-shaking moan, followed by a quick series of grunts like staccato thunder. Huh, huh, huh, huh, huh . . . and then again the long roaring moan. Moan and bark—sometimes the two overlapping each other in a rising confusion. Then again a lull, like the sea retreating for another onset.

When we came out from the hut in which beans and tortillas had been served us, we could already see the giant ceiba tree on the river-bank in silhouette against the sky. By the time we had rolled hammocks and *pabellónes* into dufflebags and Tom had brushed his teeth, it was near daylight. The increasing pallor of the night had achieved a certain established finality and the stars were all gone, or almost all. We moved about our business quietly, not only because of where we were, but also because very early morning the world over gives one a feeling that there is a baby somewhere that must not be wakened. So the real beginning of the expedition was without fanfare. Alberto and Epifanio carried our bags on their shoulders down to the shore of the stream and loaded them into one of the small dugouts moored there, the *Lucicita*. Tom and I stepped in, the men unmoored and pushed away into the flowing stream. The last star had vanished now. A minute later we

came back upstream again for something that had been forgotten. The inevitable fate of beginnings. But at sixty we were off, and this time really.

For the lazy explorer I can recommend nothing better than this sort of river-travel. Tom and I lounged amidships on our luggage, facing each other, while Alberto, standing in the stern, and Epifanio, standing in the bow, swung their long paddles. The occasional sound of their soft and melodious voices passed over us. The mosquitoes that had amounted to a mild plague at Paso Subín were now left behind, along with that oppressive sense of an ominous presence watching us, for neither thrived in such open, flaring sunlight. Now, once more, we might be men and talk out loud at our ease. It was not quite believable that this was the wilderness, here, on either hand. The Concord River had seemed as wild, where the waterfront foliage was thick enough to hide green lawns leading uphill to New England mansions. On such a lovely summer's day mightn't we meet other picnicking parties out on the river, little girls in gingham and little boys threatened by their elders for splashing each other? . . .

The illusion was only momentary. This was, after all, the tropics, and though the trees here were not of any extraordinary height, they were still not birches, willows, and hemlocks. No bitterns gulped, no bluebirds burred. Around every bend—and the river was nothing but bends—we startled a black cormorant from his perch. It was always the same one. He stretched out his snaky neck and fell from his perch, beating his wings hard, but not hard enough to keep him from splashing into the water. Then he gained momentum and swept up and about the next

bend ahead, where we startled him all over again. "*Phalacrocorax olivaceus mexicanus*," I said to impress Tom.

The fact is, I was getting a little worried that I had promised too much. I had led him to believe that wherever we went the river-banks would be studded with egrets and herons, big and little, that scarlet-blue-and-yellow macaws would hang from the vines and scream at us, that king vultures would wait on overhead, that monkeys would foregather in festoons to watch us pass. I may even have given the impression that we would have to fight our way through crocodiles. There was none of that here, so I made the most of our one cormorant: *Phalacrocorax olivaceus*, rare species, found only from the southern United States to the Argentine. "There he is again!"

The river began to widen out into a series of bays as the sun rose higher. If we had had parasols we could have used them now. It seemed that the sun was determined to purify us by fire, reduce us down to our primal essences. There was a great temptation to lean back and slip one's hat over one's face. The cormorant had grown tired of us, or the game, and gone back up river. Now a couple of kingfishers, one large and one small, were rattling ahead. Then another cormorant, playing the same game as the first. Along the bank of the largest bay we saw a floating log that, on more careful inspection, turned out to be not simply a log: it was a dugout! But there was no sign of life. We all shouted "'ola" at it, but there was no answer. The men were mystified, and gradually their mystification communicated itself to us. After all, this was not the Concord River! "'Ola," we shouted again, but with less confidence. Should we go over and see? The men thought, better not. They leaned on their paddles once more and

we followed the kingfishers and the cormorant around the bend. A lone anhinga circled in the sky overhead, very high.

At 11:10 A.M. we emerged from the mouth of the Subín into the flowing waters of the Río de la Pasión. The real meaning of this event goes far beyond the simple statement of fact. That name alone was Nile and Amazon, Yangtze, Ganges, and Congo to me. Let the general imagination traffic on those rivers to heart's content; I had for long had my own private river on the map, and it was the Río de la Pasión. I knew it well already, with that special intimacy that sometimes grows up between a man and a mark on the globe. I knew its leisurely, meandering ways, its trick of elbowing out first in one direction and then another to explore the dark forest in which it had its course. I knew its aloofness, too, for after skirting the edge of southern Petén, where it might at any time have decided to flow south and visit the habitations of men, it turned directly and abruptly north into the lonely wilderness, where it finally joined other rivers taking the same general direction to form the Usumacinta. I even had a loyalty to it, which I manifested, when we were planning the expedition, by not considering the more sensible alternative of entering the Usumacinta by way of the Río Salinas. I had seen it twice, from high in the air above, and had made it mine. No other river would do.

At 11:10 A.M., then, we emerged into the Río de la Pasión. The Arroyo Subín, which had grown narrow again toward the mouth, merely ejected us and closed up in its own vegetation behind. The men stopped paddling for a few moments of rest and we drifted out from shore toward the middle of the river. We were on a broad avenue, very

broad, and straight here for a short distance. To the left was some hundred and eighty miles of waterway leading through the jungle to its source. To the right was our route. The avenue was bordered by dense trees on either side, beyond which one could not see. The impression was of a great quiet emptiness. There was no traffic on the flat, sun-burnished expanse which flowed muddily past us, carrying small whirlpools along. The banks were even, unbroken, secretive. Their vegetation formed the horizon, which no distant mountains or nearby villas rose to break. Just emptiness and quiet and heat. A few large puffy white clouds hung overhead. . . .

There was something else overhead too. So faintly that we were for a time uncertain of it, we heard the hum of an airplane. Alberto saw it first, lost it, saw it again just as it passed behind one of the clouds. A minute later, when it came out, Tom and I found it, a sparkle of silver in space. It was the plane from Guatemala City to Flores flying over the Río de la Pasión.

A little kingfisher darted out from beneath some foliage on the bank, uttering a rattling call, saw that he was disturbing the quiet, and darted back in again. All nature was taking its midday siesta in the fierce tropical heat.

*Ya vámonos!* Again the long oars dipped and pulled against the water. The men paddled quite independently of each other, in long slow strokes, with leisure in between. They made no work of it at all, apparently. Epifanio stood in the bow, a straw hat on his head, one bare foot behind the other in a position he never changed. It seemed as if he were letting his weight do all the work for him. He leaned forward from the waist, front knee bent, bore down on the oar, let it drag back, pulled it out, and slowly leaned

forward again. This he would keep up for hour after hour, under the hottest sun, without any sign of fatigue.



When I had first made my acquaintance with the Río de la Pasión, chiefly in conversations with airplane pilots who had flown over it, I got the impression that its banks were totally uninhabited. My own first flight over it corroborated the impression, for though we flew high enough to see a large part of its interminably looping body, I could find no break in the solid vegetation of its banks. It was on the return flight from Flores to Guatemala that I saw two thatched huts side by side on one of its bends. It was inhabited after all! But more than that I could not learn, for in Guatemala this was all *tierra desconocida*.

The plain fact of the matter seems to be that between the mouth of the Subín and the mouth of the Pasión, a distance of some thirty-five miles, the river is about as densely populated as present conditions allow. During the rainy season the water will sometimes rise twenty, thirty, or more feet overnight. The only habitable ground under such conditions is high ground rising abruptly from the water's edge. Wherever a high bank occurs, as it does in about half-a-dozen places, there is a human settlement of some sort. It may be only a single hut, or it may be as many as seven. The distribution of settlements approximates the distribution of high banks.

The settlement of San Juan Acul stands on a steep slope rising abruptly on the left bank of the river. Coming round

a sharp bend, we saw it before us, a cleared hillside flaunting seven *viviendas* in all. Like all such establishments anywhere along the rivers, each consisted of a rectangular hut made of poles planted in the ground picket-fashion and roofed with palm-leaf thatch; and a cookhouse, behind, similarly constructed, but black with soot inside.

Our host at San Juan Acul, where we spent the night, was Alberto's father's brother, a thin, dim old wraith of a man with gray hair, and much more definitely a Negro than Alberto. So, quite unexpectedly, we came across something of Alberto's family history.

The exceptions to the statement that all the Negroes in northern Central America are concentrated along its Caribbean coast are so few as to be negligible. Some of Alberto's black ancestors were probably brought over to the island of Jamaica in slave-ships from the West Coast of Africa in the middle of the 17th century, or even earlier, during the numbered days of Spanish rule. Later, one conjectures, the family was imported to the mainland coast to aid in logging operations with the settlement of Belize by the British. Another strong probability is that some ancestors were slaves under French rule on the island of St. Vincent, and that others were Carib Indians, native to St. Vincent, who mixed their blood with that of the Negroes. These Carib Negroes were forced to flee from St. Vincent and settled all along the coast of Central America from Nicaragua to British Honduras. Some of their descendants drifted up the Belize River, the main highway for penetration of the interior along this part of the coast. Alberto's uncle, our host, was born at El Cayo, near the Guatemalan frontier, and recalled that in his early childhood he had been able to speak some English, all of which he had long since forgot-



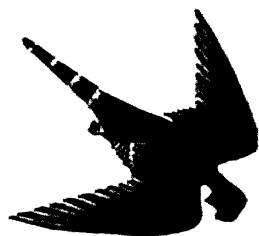
ten, including even the word for *si*. He had been brought up in San Benito, opposite Flores on Lake Petén, and now for thirty years, as he estimated it, he had been living here at San Juan Acul. His grandnephews and grandnieces, Alberto's children in Sayaxché—in whom, one supposes, the Negro features had almost quite disappeared—would receive their future upbringing in Tenosique, Mexico (as soon as Alberto got around to transporting them there), and it is easily conceivable that some of them will get jobs on the little cattle-boats that ply the lower Usumacinta and the Gulf coast as far as Vera Cruz and Campeche. Beyond this one cannot see. This is an age of human drift in the Petén, an interregnum between an ancient settled culture and a problematical future one. Meanwhile, men are like spores on the wind.

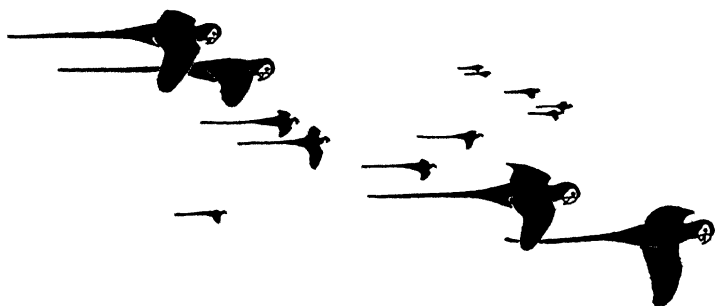
To the right, as one entered the elder Moro's hut, was a long split log that served as a bench. My first act was to sit down on it, my second to lie down and stretch out full-length on my back. Having done this, I no longer had the will to move. Both Tom and I had been hard hit by the beans we had eaten in Paso Subín the previous evening, but he had partially recovered, while I had gone from bad to worse. Alberto suggested that we spend the night with his uncle instead of trying to reach La Florida that day, which we could not do in any case before dark. Tom concurred in the suggestion. So did I.

San Juan Acul was as pleasant a spot as one could choose for a tropical half-holiday. The settlement was neat and clean, despite the pigs and the cowed dogs with bare sores standing out all over them. It was relatively free of mosquitoes, too, and no one we saw was half dead with malaria.

Tom and I agreed, in later retrospection, that San Juan Acul was the best overnight-stop we came to anywhere.

During the course of the afternoon I recovered my health in some measure, and after Tom and I had gone for a swim in the river my cure was, for the time being, complete. Later we sat out on the doorstep in the company of our ancient host, overlooking the flowing river below us and the jungle beyond. He was such a dim old Negro, sitting there in the twilight as if silently contemplating thirty years of waterflow, that it seemed doubtful he could see at all out of his misty eyes. He puffed regularly at a little smudge of leaves that he kept alive in a pipe improvised out of some gourd. Sometimes he spoke, but more often he was silent, looking out at the flowing river. Dusk was gradually overcoming it, but there were still mangrove swallows playing close over its surface. Howling monkeys, in the distance, were roaring, moaning, and barking. When the swallows had gone at last and it was almost too dim out to distinguish the river at all any more, a white-throated bat falcon put in its appearance, shooting by several times in succession, like some large nocturnal swift. Owls screamed from across the river, and in a few more minutes the only light was that of the stars and the little cooking fires.





## CHAPTER VI

IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF THE night, not properly morning at all, though our watches said three o'clock. Tom and I were sitting drowsily on the edges of our hammocks, lacing up our boots like firemen called out betimes. The trick was to hold the flashlight under one armpit or between the teeth while one's hands were busy with the lacing. In the hut next door the men were already stirring, getting our breakfast. Epifanio came along swinging the kerosene lantern to say one cup was missing from *la cocina*. *La cocina*, the kitchen, was a battered old "Revelation" suitcase, bearing the initials of an aunt of mine who certainly never expected it would be used for such a purpose when she bought it. In it we kept all our food-supplies and cooking equipment. We found the cup and, after I had hastily brushed my teeth in it, restored it to *la cocina*. Instructions were given, in whispers, for more water to be boiled for our canteens, and the usual admonition about the absolute necessity of allowing the water to boil a full five minutes (our only water-supply came from the river, and at best tasted like a dilution of mud). Being

fully laced by now, Tom went off to superintend the cooking of oatmeal, an undertaking that marked the beginning of a rebellion against the bean. Tom, one of whose gifts it is to learn quickly, was already able to direct even such a complex operation in Spanish, with only the occasional aid of a sweeping gesture and loud "ahem."

By four-thirty we were already moving our household goods down to the shore, a delicate operation in the darkness, for the slope was steep and slippery. Two flashlights, bobbing uphill and bobbing down again, were the only visible signs of our activity, which must have had an air of mysterious conspiracy, as though we were slipping away from a beleaguered settlement in the dark and quiet of night, having drugged the sentinels beforehand. (Tom Sawyer would have loved it.) We were quiet and efficient, except when Tom or I stumbled and said "damnl" At last we were fully loaded, including even the spray-gun for insects. I went uphill again to have a last look around the empty hut, turning the beam of my light into its corners, and then we were off. It was just ten minutes to five, and as we slipped away from shore a faintly visible mist forming over the river trailed past us in wisps and clouds. The current murmured confidentially against our gunwales, and we could hear the little sucking sound of whirlpools farther out. Occasionally the quavering wail of an owl came to us from beyond the shore.

With the first sign of approaching day, the river-banks began to come to life. At first there were only a few tentative warbles and chirps. Then the sound of the orchestra tuning-up. Cries of every description passed back and forth across the river. Isolated voices gave forth snatches of song. Wings fluttered. A chachalaca, substituting for the rooster,

suddenly announced the dawn in a long scream. And behold, it was the dawn! Night was rapidly fading away, especially in the east, where the sky had gone white. Through milky mist, drawn out in fluid ribbons, the heavy vegetation of the banks was becoming more distinct every moment. Little groups of birds took courage from the increasing light and crossed the river past us, their gray forms just distinguishable. The confused medley of their voices, coming to us from both banks, was continuous now. Monkeys were howling again. A few minutes later the sun rose; another day of light and heat had begun.

The morning was already well on when we came to our next settlement on the banks of the *Pasión*; three or four huts called *Aguas Calientes*. Archaeology was reported here, so we put in to examine it. A path led back from the settlement through *milpas* and came to an abrupt end at the edge of the tall forest, within half a mile of the shore. The sun was an excruciating blaze in the open, but we were no better off when we entered the heavy shade of the forest. Here the atmosphere was that of a steam-bath, so that every movement was made with deliberate effort to overcome the heavy lethargy with which the heat affected us. For a few minutes we hunted about near the edge of the forest, shouting at each other to prevent separation. *Cohune* palms stood about us in profusion, their immensely broad fronds arching heavily. The going was quite easy here, for this was primary forest, and though it joined in a relatively solid canopy overhead, the floor, about the bases of the great trees, was open, or obstructed only by large ferns. After describing an arc through the woods, we found what we were searching for at the very edge of the *milpas*. Sunk into the remains of a stone-lined

cyst was one of the most beautifully sculptured Mayan stelae I had ever seen, half of it broken off and lying alongside the other half, which was firmly planted in the ground. The stone as a whole, about five feet tall, depicted in low relief a man with elaborate feather-headress holding a sturdy club in his left hand. The legs were slightly straddled, the feet pointed outward and represented in profile. The profuse detail of the figure's regalia was still crisp in outline, as if it were less than a century old, not more than a millennium. Surrounding the figure were several columns of hieroglyphs, carved with the neatness and precision of the best Mayan style, and more glyphs adorned the sides.

We were just getting ready to photograph it when there came a loud interruption from overhead. Something clattered past in the sky, wheeled, and returned. A flock of scarlet-blue-and-yellow macaws were circling like pigeons above the edge of the clearing, crying raucously. They all rocketed past in close formation, their tails streaming, banking at the turns to show the rainbows on their backs in the brilliant sunlight. Aware that archaeologists should not be distracted by ornithology, we tried to go on with our preparations for making photographs. . . . But here they were back again, squawking, wheeling in the sunlight, the bare white skin of their cheeks and their heavy overhanging beaks giving them the look of gorgeously costumed old men in flight. Then they were gone.

Tom cleaned the stone, pulling away vines and rootlets, while I set up the apparatus of photography. But there was another distraction: we were being eaten up by mosquitoes. Everything we did had to be done quickly between slaps. Finally it was all done, photographs taken of every detail of the decoration, and we could make our escape.

Again we drifted slowly down the flowing stream between forested banks to the accompanying moans of monkeys, Alberto and Epifanio dipping their long paddles regularly and easily in the motion that had become second nature to them. Alberto, having lived with us a day and a half already, was becoming increasingly jovial. He sang a long ballad beginning "*A mi me gusta mirar los aeroplanos*" (I like to see the airplanes), and going on to recount the epic adventures of the great Mexican aviator, Emiliano Carranza. "*Ya me vestido, me voy a mi rancho, y me regreso cantando mi canción. Es el corrido d'Emiliano Carranza: en aeroplano me vine desde el sur.*" One verse gave an account of a motion-picture ("nothing good") in which an old lady insults the aviator because her daughter ascended in an airplane (tri-motored) which "failed" in a short while. "*Ya en el cine no está nada bueno. Hai una vieja insultando el aviador, porque su niña subió en aeroplano—en poco rato fallaba el tri-motor.*" He then surprised us by a barely recognizable distortion of "*La Marseillaise*," rendered without words. Tom and I recognized it simultaneously, in the middle of the performance, and responded by a duet of the orthodox version.

Don Tomás had, by this time, become an object of great joy to both our men, but especially to Alberto. I account for his amusement over everything Tom did by the fact that he, at least, had never seen anyone remotely like him before. Tom is tall, with very light straw-colored hair, blue eyes, and an extremely white skin that would show a blush on next to no provocation. This, in the dusky and uncivilized parts of Central America, is definitely freakish. Undoubtedly the passage of Don Tomás through their territory has by now become a rooted legend among the in-

habitants of the region, similar to the legend of Kukulcán, the bearded blond man from the East, or of the blond conquistador, Don Pedro de Alvarado, whom the Indians of Guatemala called "Tonatiuh," the Sun. We watched the legend growing from day to day. Everything Don Tomás did was cherished in the memory of the boatmen and repeated on every possible occasion. When, finally, he fell overboard near the mouth of the Pasión, his immortality was assured.

We reached La Florida at 11:45 in the morning. It was a replica of San Juan Acul, minus one house and possibly compressed into somewhat less space. The surrounding forest, too, which crowded dangerously on the settlement, had grown taller and richer. There is a progressive increase in the height of the jungle, the number of mosquitoes, and the richness of wild-life as one goes down river till, at the mouth of the Pasión, all the features of the wilderness reach their greatest proportions.

A hut was immediately found for our habitation at the top of the settlement (everything here was pitched on a steep slope) and made ready. Next we sent for Napoleon, a vaguely negroid young man who wore an old black hat with the brim turned up sharply in front. Napoleon, a Floridino by birth, had guided the Carnegie expedition of the previous year to the ruins of La Amelia, some three kilometers back in the jungle. Our first inquiry of him, for we had learned the bitter lesson of Polol, was as to whether the path was open. He said not—no one had gone that way since the *gringos* who came over a year ago. With the wisdom born of experience, we now commissioned him to take a boy, his nephew, and open the path for us that afternoon,



so that we could reach the ruins without difficulty early in the morning.

The next item on our agenda was to deliver a photograph (courtesy of the Carnegie Institution) of a little boy called Manuelito pounding rice in a wooden mortar. Manuelito's mother, a young mestizo woman whom we found in the next hut below our own, received the photograph with a demonstration of enthusiasm such as one rarely sees among the natives of these parts. "Mire!" she cried. "*Es Manuelito!*" (Look! It is Manuelito!) "Ai, mire! Mire como muele el arroz!" (Look how he pounds the rice!) "Ai, que bonita! Mire lo, pues! *Es Manuelito perfectamente! Mire, mire que es bonita! El muele el arroz!*" Her shouts and laughter quickly brought Manuelito's grandparents, who smiled broadly and shook their heads in appreciation of the wonders of modern science.

Item three: the everlasting problem of the *pabellón*. For two successive nights, now, I had stifled in that portable version of the Black Hole of Calcutta with which Taintor had saved the situation at the time of our last *pabellón*-crisis. I felt that I had already undergone sufficient punishment, so Alberto was dispatched to find out whether anyone in the settlement would trade his *pabellón* for mine, plus some additional compensation. He took my monstrosity under his arm and went off down the slope. A few minutes later he was back with a magnificent net *pabellón*, dyed a deep blue—from Manuelito. I rummaged among our stock of trade-goods, which consisted of cigarettes and an assortment of bowie knives in leather sheaths that we had bought in the market-place at Guatemala City for fifteen cents apiece. "Here," I said, handing one of the knives to Alberto, "take this to Manuelito."

"Oh, no, Don Luis! He would never accept it."

"But why not?"

"It is worth much."

"But if I want him to accept it?"

Alberto got the better of me by all but refusing to be party to such lavishness. He compromised, at last, on two packages of "Extra King-Bee" cigarettes, and went off with them to complete the trade.

A few minutes later Manuelito himself, a healthy, pleasant-faced boy of about twelve, appeared in our doorway, his arms loaded with some strange native fruit which he called "sandía." They were large, about the size of honeydew melons, and oval. "These," said Manuelito, depositing his armful at our feet, "are for the cigarillos."

After he had gone, Tom and I examined them gingerly, finally cutting one open with a machete to find out what it was like inside. To our surprise, we had just received a tribute of dwarf watermelons! After that we ate sandías wherever we could get them along the rivers.

The brotherhood of man is well established on the river-shores, and we profited by it. A whole hut was generally cleared out for Tom and me, without our asking, the owners doubling up for the night with their neighbors. It would have been, at the least, gauche of us to have offered compensation for this magnificent service. An occasional gift of cigarettes or quinine was accepted, but only as a gift, and sometimes it had to be pressed as such. It would not have occurred to Napoleon, for example, to request compensation for spending an afternoon opening the path to La Amelia and guiding us there in the morning, any more than it would have occurred to him to refuse the service.

Likewise, it did not occur to Manuelito that he might expect some reward for giving me his excellent *pabellón* in exchange for my very bad one. I believe he would have given it to me without any exchange at all. Whenever we bought eggs or fruit, however, there was no question about accepting pennies in payment. These were commodities in trade, and so came under a different set of rules.

Like all riparian peoples, the natives of these river-banks do a good deal of traveling. Many of their supplies—machetes and clothing, chiefly—they obtain from Flores or Tenosique, in trade for the fruit of their trees and the corn from their *milpas*. In their passage to the edge of civilization in either direction, they rely on the hospitality of the settlements along the way, putting up in their huts at night and cooking over their fires. Everyone knows everyone else along the rivers—for, after all, there are not so many. There cannot be more than fifty adults between the Arroyo Subín and the mouth of the Pasión, and probably nowhere near so many. Alberto and Epifanio were known and welcome wherever we stopped. Everyone in this region is friendly and good-natured. The exceptions to this are taken care of when they occur, drastically if necessary.

One story illustrates the informal course of justice in the case of an exception. At a certain point along the Pasión we passed a solitary hut standing high up on a bank and slowly falling to ruin. It had been inhabited, up to the previous year, by a man who could not get along with his neighbors and so had been obliged to live apart. He was a thoroughgoing bad man, according to report. Even isolated as he was, however, he inspired fear of what he might do. Finally, one night, the men of a nearby settlement banded together, took their machetes in hand, and paddled up to

his solitary hut. They came upon him there, disposed of him, and returned quietly to their homes.

Again this afternoon, as at San Juan Acul, Don Tomás and I became gentlemen of leisure. Chartering the *Lucicita* for a swimming excursion, we paddled her upstream about the first bend of the river. The mangrove swallows, most jewel-like and delicate of their tribe, flitted all about us, fluttering their wings and swirling like insects close over the flat surface, into which they dipped briefly from moment to moment. Clumsier than the birds, we took off our clothes and plunged from the gunwales, swimming out in wide circles and returning quickly at the thought of crocodiles.

In the evening, a thin, youngish man with a delicate face was sitting on a log-bench in front of his hut, poring over some piece of literature that he held in his hands, much in the accepted posture of the young Abraham Lincoln studying to achieve greatness. From where I stood, in the doorway of the adjacent hut, I could see that his lips were moving slowly. All this aroused my curiosity, so I strolled over to pay an evening call.

"*Buenos tardes, Señor,*" I said when I was abreast of him.

He looked up and smiled broadly. Disingenuously, he had been observing me out of the corner of one eye all along. "*Buenos tardes, Señor,*" he responded.

We fell into conversation, and in a moment the little pamphlet, dog-eared and dirty, changed hands. It was an evangelistic tract, published at an address in New York City, N. Y., by a missionary society, and illustrated with line-drawings that carried a symbolism too elaborate for my comprehension. There were lambs and hearts and doves and

sunbursts scattered freely over its pages, beside the conventional representations of the crucifixion. With a minimum of impertinence, I finally managed to ask him where he had learned to read.

*"En Flores . . . un poco . . . hace muchos años,"* he answered diffidently. A little in Flores many years ago. He expressed his unbounded admiration for the (heretical) tract, and I agreed with him that the pictures were *bonita*. Along the banks of the rivers, the Church of Rome has probably several hundred would-be faithful children. They all confess the Catholic faith. But here they are doomed, for the most part, to live without instruction, without confession, without baptism or marriage or extreme unction or any of the other intermediary formalities that are the only means by which they can partake of grace. It is fortunate that in God's house are many mansions.



At 6:40 A.M., machetes in hand, we set off in single file along the trail to the ruins of La Amelia, Napoleon and his nephew first, then Tom and I, then Alberto and Epifanio. Here all was big forest, a magician's garden which we en-

tered now like furtive gnomes. It was uncertain whether the trees were immense, as they seemed, or we ourselves had grown smaller. A great blue and gold butterfly, appearing gigantic by contrast with our diminished stature, flapped through the long corridor ahead of us, turned off abruptly, disappeared into a maze of leafy antechambers, and reappeared in our path a minute or two later, rising and falling as though jerked from above at the end of a string. But this was bait for swifter fish than we. We didn't count. All about us the boles of trees rose straight up from buttressed foundations into the unknown. To look up too suddenly might take one's breath away.

Here a highway crossed our path at right angles. It was four or five inches wide, beaten as hard and smooth as macadam, and (as Thomas Belt, who was the first to describe such a phenomenon for science, put it) "more thronged than the streets of the city of London." This highway was of special interest because it represented the most ancient agricultural civilization of the New World, one that has, moreover, survived the downfall of every human civilization but our own. The peasant-workers of a colony of sauba ants were out along the highway, bringing in forage to promote the growth of the domesticated fungus that they cultivate for their living. Those returning from the fields all carried relatively gigantic segments of green leaf balanced vertically over their bodies, so that one had the impression, at first glance, of a parade of perambulating leaves along the highway. Those moving the other way went unloaded. We stepped over the highway carefully and continued along the path to the ruins.

More than anything, what gave these woods the air of an enchanted forest was the invisible music that pierced

them in bursts of whistling and intermittent calls from either side of the trail. The forest was only apparently open, for when one tried to locate the source of any sound, even though it seemed to be near by, it was clear that all these individual leaves and trunks and vines, slight in themselves, together effectively guarded the privacy of the jungle against peering eyes. Suddenly, far aloft, the whole leafy lattice-work of the forest-top began to shake as if a dozen catspaws of wind were boiling together over our heads. We knew what this portended. A band of spider monkeys were rattling the treetops to attract our attention below. Of all the denizens of the jungle, these only seem not to want privacy. Like children in the first stages of self-consciousness, they must have an audience for their antics. Our little cavalcade stopped, now, to watch their aerial acrobatics. All we could see at first, through the intervening foliage, was an occasional dark shape scuttling along the framework of the overhead canopy, leaping across intervals of space, pulling down the fringes of the trees in which it landed. At last I found one little fellow sitting quietly on a limb and staring down directly at me with those absurdly tragic eyes of monkeys that are in such sharp contrast to all their behavior. A little lost monkey. He got up, now that I was watching him, ran two or three steps along the limb, suddenly swung below so that he was dangling by one arm, and put the fingertips of his free hand to his head. "Isn't it sad," he seemed to be thinking, gazing down on us with wide, sorrowful eyes, "that you and I have so much in common, so much in common—and yet are quite different, quite different? Why ever did you desert the treetops?" Then up he swung again and scampered out to the end of the branch,

as far as he could hold. Here he stopped to bark hoarsely at us. He had, after all, no use for renegades.

Exactly one hour after leaving La Florida, at 7:40 A.M., we stepped across a dry stream-bed, the Arroyo La Amelia, and faced the ruins. What showed at first glance was an abrupt hill, heavily forested, the acropolis of an ancient Mayan civic center. We got out Shook's little map of it, made the previous year, and began to orient ourselves. Here, on this face, should be the grand staircase—and here it was! Scratching the dirt of the steep slope we found the broken stones laid in horizontal ranks set back one above the other. Then, to get a general idea of the whole, we made a tour of the structure, which took us a long and irregular way about through the jungle and back to our starting point. In one place, part of the original embankment-wall was exposed, showing perfectly cut and laid ashlar in regular courses, comparable to the best masonry of the whole Mayan area, that of Copán in Honduras.

Now we set to work to do the job we had come for. The Carnegie expedition of the previous year, in the few hours they could spare at La Amelia, had discovered seven stelae placed in symmetrical array at the foot of the stairway: three in the middle, three on the left side, and one on the right. Presumably there were two others to be found on the right side to balance those on the left, but there had not been time to investigate. What made this quest especially inviting was that one of the stones on the left side (Stela I) had turned out to be a truly beautiful and sophisticated piece of sculpture, representing the finest Mayan art. Our mission and our hope was to uncover its mate on the other side of the staircase.

Before setting to work, we located Stela I, the two pieces



of which had been rolled over onto their faces to protect them from the weather and, tugging together, succeeded in turning them back. In low, crisp relief, almost as if it had been cut yesterday, a Mayan chieftain or deity in the most elaborate regalia of waving plumes and heavy jewelry danced triumphantly over the prostrate body of a snarling jaguar. The jaguar, in his whole pose and expression, was so realistically portrayed, with so much art, that he seemed to be actually alive and dangerous; his tail twitched nervously and his features showed a perfect compound of fear and venom as he looked up at the dancing figure above him. The triumph of man over brute nature was exultantly expressed in the attitude of the dancer. But did the sculptor, I wonder, foresee this final victory of brute nature over the expression of his triumph, which now lay shattered in the dust?

At the right side of the staircase, in the position equivalent to that of Stela I on the left, the ground, under a thin surface-layer of humus, was a confusion of broken stones, most of them having evidently toppled down from the staircase above. For an hour or more we dug away among these stones with our machetes, turning them over and examining them on all faces, then setting them back in their original confusion. It was hot work, but we went at it with the zeal of discoverers. Finally we had unearthed three broken pieces that apparently belonged to the stela we had been looking for. Two of them fitted together, and after having been cleaned with a stiff brush revealed, ever so faintly, the remains of long sculptured plumes that had evidently formed part of the headdress of such a figure as was carved on Stela I. That was all. Time had beaten us to it, obliterating our discovery before it was made. The

pattern impressed on that stone, into which the soul of the artist and of the culture that had produced him had gone, was vanished from the earth forever.

Before noon we were back in La Florida, and after a hurried lunch we embarked once more on the eternally flowing waters of the Río de la Pasión.



This was the last and most spectacular stage on the Pasión River. The forest, which had not been impressive when we emerged from the Subín, was now becoming more imposing at every turn, and as it increased in grandeur so it increased in the richness of its wild-life. Macaws, which we had first seen at Aguas Calientes, were common now. We saw them passing, almost always in pairs, up and down the river, squawking stridently as they flew. Or we found them perched in the trees back from shore. One species of tree, especially, seemed their favorite. It had a straight and slender bole, from the top of which large branches diverged horizontally, and a delicate feathery foliage that was not dense enough to hide its white skeleton. Wherever we came across it, and it was common, we saw the old men perched with quiet dignity on its horizontal limbs, scarlet and impassive, their long, pointed tails extending straight down below their perches. But there was always some activity among them. A pair, flying together with steady wing-beats, passing behind the trees and appearing again, would come to one of this feathery, white-barked species: backing their gaudy wings and spreading their tails, they would

ascend into it and come to rest. Then they might go for a walk along a limb, a slow promenade, leaning forward awkwardly so that their long tails could clear the support behind them. Again, on a sudden impulse, they might flap away from the tree and head out in a direct line, squawking together.

We were almost never out of hearing of the howling monkeys now. I had an idea then, as I still have, that no other animal-sound in nature carries so far as the strange medley of roars, moans, and barks produced by a family of howlers. (Despite their names, they have no sound that could properly be described as a howl.) Tom, whose training is scientific, was inclined to be doubtful of such a sweeping generalization when I delivered myself of it. There was always the question of whether the howlers we listened to were far or near, for those we saw on the river-banks were always silent. We experimented with the matter, scientifically, by observing the time it took for us to pass through the range of a particular howler's voice, and then, by a sort of triangulation, coming to a rough determination of how far back from the river-banks he was located. Finally we tried a more direct approach to the problem. One family of four—father, mother, and two partly grown young—were taking their midday ease in a low tree that grew directly from the water's edge on the left bank. Large, black, and ape-like, they reclined with Roman dignity along the branches, as though on divans. When we nosed into the bank beneath them they remained undisturbed, merely turning their heads a little to look down on us. The old male was lying on his stomach, one arm hanging limply from the branch.

"Hello, old fellow. *Que tal? Buenos tardes,*" we addressed him.

He continued to look down at us with a sleepy and disagreeable expression, disdaining to respond to our courtesies, like some old hippopotamus who has been disturbed in his sleep.

"Hello, you old baboon! We said 'hello'!"

Still no sound. But the expression of the eyes was unmistakable. It said: "Why don't you run along now?"

"We want to hear you talk, old man. Say something!" We waved our arms and made gestures as if throwing stones at him.

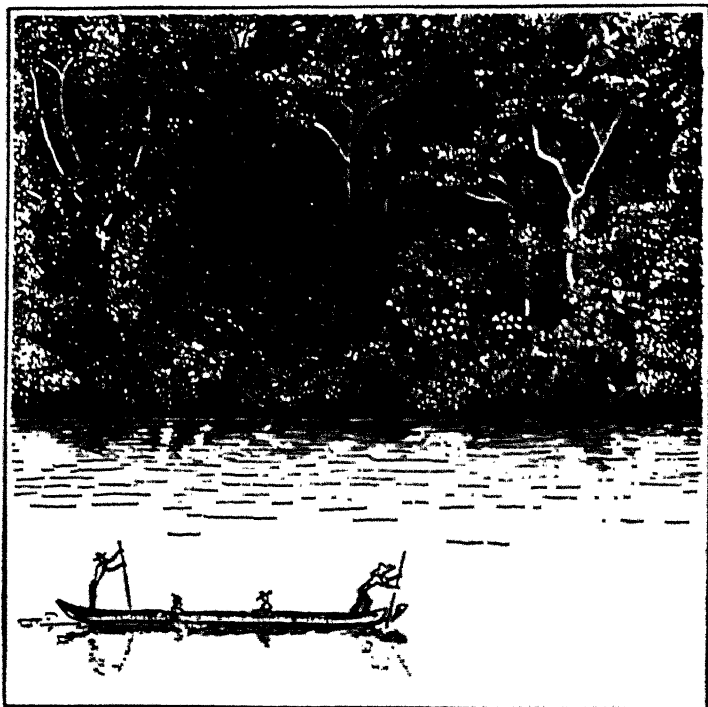
This roused him, but slowly. He pulled in his arm and half raised himself from his reclining posture. Now we could see, like a goiter or a beard, the phenomenal development of the lower jaw that made possible his great voice. For a moment he stared at us sleepily, as did his wife and children; then, seeing that we were disposed to become a nuisance, he stretched his head down toward us and began barking, or grunting, with a deep resonance that meant menace, but very softly.

"He's not feeling up to scratch today," I said by way of apology to Tom as we pushed back into the stream. "That's not even a hint of what he could do if he were wide awake." \*

\* Since this was written, I have come across the following statement in Paul Russel Cutright's "The Great Naturalists Explore South America" (The Macmillan Company, 1940), which I quote here for Tom's benefit: "If contests were held among the beasts of the world to determine the one with the most powerful voice, the howling monkey would surely be acclaimed champion on every occasion—the roar of the lion, the howl of the wolf, even the wail of a banshee dwindling to a mere whisper beside the efforts of the great, bearded vocalist of the South American forests."

On the right bank, where it rose sharply from the river's edge, a lone hut, the thatching of its roof still incomplete, stood in the midst of a partially cleared area of ground in which the fallen trees still lay. But there was no sign of life. Alberto and Epifanio explained that this was the prospective home of one of the inhabitants of La Florida, who had decided to migrate. What had caused his decision was not clear. Presumably he wanted more land than was available at La Florida, or better land; possibly his move was the result of dissension with his neighbors; or he may have preferred this utter solitude. At present he had gone to Flores to obtain supplies. When he returned he would finish building his new home and clearing the land; then he would bring his woman and children from La Florida and establish them in it. Thus we got an insight into the manner in which new settlements spring up along the river. Some day this man's residence will have a name, the name will become known and eventually be reported, through indirect channels, to the men who make our maps. Then a new name will be added to the map of Guatemala and will appear in the atlases.

Where we had first emerged onto the Pasión, from the mouth of the Subín, the river-banks had been so flat that it had been impossible to see beyond the outermost trees that fringed the shoreline. Now we were in a changed landscape. The forest, rising in low hills on either side, was often visible for some distance back. Green vistas reached inland from the shore repeatedly as we rounded the bends, showing the masses of undifferentiated jungle-foliage above which rose the greater trees, towering on enormous trunks, supporting an active community of birds: parrots of three



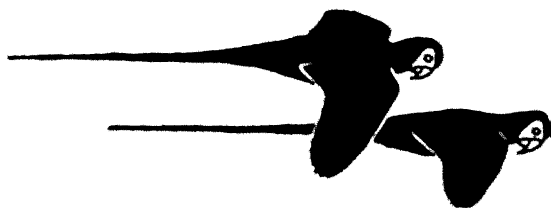
species, macaws, toucans, guams, and a host of lesser fry. The river itself became more varied the farther down we went. At one point it parted about a large wooded island and we had our choice of channels. At sunset we came to a wide hairpin bend round which the water swirled mud-dily, with another island at its outside margin. The whole western sky was a blaze of glory as we swept around it, the men paddling more to give direction to the boat than impetus, for we were being carried along fast enough now. Then dusk fell and in a few more minutes the stars came out all together.

Tom and I were both completely contented with life

during these hours. We had a sense of infinite leisure and peace and freedom from responsibility, yet we were living every minute. Lounging on our luggage amidships, we occasionally called each other's attention to some sight that especially merited notice: a large mahogany, or a crocodilian pushing his way inshore, or a flock of small, brilliantly plumaged birds. For the rest, Tom was in that exhilarated intellectual condition that always manifests itself in him by an orgy of explaining. He ran through half our agenda of conversation for the entire trip in a few hours. He and Alberto were the talkative members of our party. Epifanio and I did the listening. Now, as Tom explained various abstruse phenomena to me in English, Alberto gossiped to Epifanio in his soft and sonorous Spanish, chuckling with good humor between statements.

When night came, Tom and I got out our flashlight and played with it. Two belated macaws came squawking overhead, and turning the beam into the sky we caught their scarlet breasts neatly in it. Then we turned it down on the river and discovered, to our surprise, that it was alive with winged creatures darting erratically over the surface. At first we thought them bats, but then it became apparent that they belonged to some small species of goatsucker. The game was to keep the beam of light on one for more than a flashing instant. Tom and I took turns at this, each claiming to outdo the other. Occasionally we ran the beam along the dark foliage of the banks, expecting to pick up the glowing eyes of some jungle-cat, but always without success. Once we debated whether a particular shape on shore, just barely distinguishable in the beam, was not that of some animal, but came to no conclusion.

We had both happily forgotten that there was ever to be an end to this day's run, when suddenly we saw a solitary twinkling light high up on the right bank and Alberto announced that we had arrived at the mouth of the *Pasión*.







## CHAPTER VII

THE SETTLEMENT AT THE mouth of the Pasión is designated on the maps of Petén as "Trapiche," which is merely the Spanish for sugar-mill; so it is a surprise to learn that it is actually just that and nothing more. Our own settlements have borne their present names for so long that it does not occur to us to take them literally. We do not expect to find a ford for cattle at Oxford, though there must have been one there at some time, nor do we look for a beacon on the summit of Beacon Hill. The day may yet come when the citizens of the proud and ancient city of Trapiche are surprised to learn, from some such ancient record as this, that there once was an actual *trapiche* on the site of their city.

For the benefit of posterity, then, it may be well to record that the entire region was, in those days, one solid forest, unvisited by man, a place of pestilence that had not yet been made habitable. A certain Don Pioquinto Aguilar had, however, gained a precarious foothold at the edge of the forest, on the river-bank. Here he had planted some cane and erected a crude sugar-mill to produce the black

*panela* with which the natives sweetened their coffee. The mill was located on top of a high, slippery bank overlooking the river ("that must be down on the waterfront, near South Street," says the citizen of the future), and consisted of a thatched roof, supported on poles, sheltering a great horizontal wheel sunk into a pit, and a cracked earth-oven for distilling the juices of the cane. The roof also provided shelter for an old horse whose function it was to turn the mill, an assortment of chickens, and three turkeys, one of which was crippled and in continuous pain. Beside the mill stood the thatched hut, with two rooms, in which the family of Don Pioquinto resided. Some half-dozen acres of sugar-cane held off the towering trees of the surrounding forest.

The citizen of the future may also be interested to know that in the first half of the 20th century there was definite evidence that this whole region at the juncture of the Pasión and Salinas Rivers had once been a populous center of human culture. So far as was known at that time, Don Pioquinto represented a second pioneering. Presumably an earlier Don Pioquinto, living long before the Christian era, had also settled on this bank, erected his thatch, and stolen a few acres from the margin of the forest. In the course of centuries, more settlers had moved in and, by their co-operative zeal, eventually succeeded in reducing the forest and establishing a thriving human civilization in its place. But the wheel of time continued its relentless course, the cycle of civilization was accomplished in a few hundreds of years, and the forest returned. It may be that the citizen of the future will understand the nature of this historical cycle better than it was understood in the 20th

century, for in those days history was still so young that the blooming and wilting of civilizations had been demonstrated only some eight or ten times and there were as yet insufficient data to demonstrate beyond dispute that a civilization, like any organism, has a life-cycle to which it is bound.

The little settlement of Trapiche, as we found it, was under a blight. To us, coming fresh off the river in the dark of night, Don Pioquinto's establishment held the atmosphere of a charnel house. Its inhabitants were not quite dead, but on the borderline. During the thirty-six hours we spent as his guest, we never saw our host's features. He was merely an indistinct mass lying in a hammock, enclosed in a white *pabellón* like a caterpillar in a cocoon, and moaning softly on occasion to show that he was still alive. He had *calentura*, fever—in other words, malaria. His Señora, a youngish, strongly built woman, was still on her feet, but only by a supreme effort. In the morning she, too, was hammock-ridden with *calentura*. The only other adult in the place was a wraith of a man with sunken cheeks, a warmed-over corpse for whom it was, apparently, an effort even to speak. What relationship he bore to the rest of the family was never clear to us. His chief occupation, while we were there, was hunting, and in the morning he set off into the forest with a rusty shotgun over his arm and a pack of curs at his heels. There were also two children, a small girl and a smaller boy, who were charming but lackadaisical. The whole establishment was run-down, dirty, and disordered, presumably because there was not enough life left in its inhabitants to keep it up.

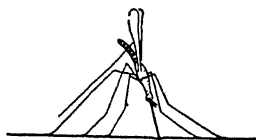
The chief agent of this misery was immediately apparent in the crowd of buzzing mosquitoes on hand to welcome us as soon as we touched shore. The *Anopheles* mosquito of the tropics, which goes about carrying the malarial parasite from one person to another, differs from our familiar *Culex* in that it shuns the light. It is a creature of darkness. Even inside the hut, however, lighted as it was by a kerosene-lantern, mosquitoes that had been crowded out of the darkness sought consolation in the feast we offered. Tom and I envisioned long lines of them waiting in turn to bite the Señora and then coming to visit us, and since there was nothing to be done about it we became fatalists on the spot.

Our high spirits of a few minutes before, when we had been out on the river, were quickly dissipated by this nocturnal arrival upon such a gloomy and depressing scene. In the dismal light of one kerosene-lantern, the ghostly white *pabellón* containing the sick man occupied the center of the room; in one corner the poor Señora was forcing herself to stir about the open fire, for one must eat or die; the anonymous hunter gossiped idly with Alberto and Epifanio, who were preparing eggs and coffee for us over the same fire; the lackadaisical children and unutterably wretched curs wandered about and got in the way. We fled from the hut as soon as we had eaten, and hung our hammocks under the open shelter of the mill, which we shared amicably with the horse. In wakeful intervals of the night we heard him crunching his dry fodder between his teeth, snuffing and stamping and whisking his tail.

In the morning our Alberto was ailing. Some kind of worm had found its way into the fleshy part of his leg and

deposited its eggs. The result of this invasion was a sore that looked like a boil and caused him distress. We contributed soothing lotions in addition to his own treatment of wet leaves held on by a bandage. We also dosed him with quinine, for he thought he felt a touch of fever coming on.

Our plan had been to spend that whole day in the pursuit of archaeology, but we had first to attend to a household problem. Both of us were, by this time, badly in need of clean clothes; so, early in the morning, Alberto and Epifanio departed for Mexico with a bundle of our laundry, leaving it at a settlement on the banks of the Salinas to be called for the following day. This took longer than we had expected, and it was after eleven by the time they got back. Abandoning Alberto at Trapiche to nurse his sick leg, we set off immediately with Epifanio for the ruins of Altar de Sacrificios, on the opposite shore.



It might be expected that the confluence of two such streams as the Pasión and Salinas would be archaeologically important. Human culture has a way of following river-courses, and where two rivers join in an area that once supported a human culture the archaeologist can usually wield his spade with the assurance that his labor will be rewarded. And so it is here. But this junction has, in addition, a special importance today, at just this stage in the solution of the problems of Mayan archaeology.

As the archaeologist looks at it, the whole Mayan area,

from northern Yucatán through the highlands of Guatemala, is a vast jigsaw picture-puzzle, the individual pieces of which have been scattered, mixed up, and most often lost by the action of time, as by a series of catastrophic earthquakes. His business is to reassemble what pieces remain to form as coherent a picture as possible of their original order. He begins by picking up a few isolated fragments that are in themselves meaningless when it comes to tracing the cultural history of the region, and then he tries to find the connecting pieces between them. In one corner of the area—say in northern Yucatán—he may be able to group several pieces together right at the start, and thus get one corner of his picture complete. Mayapán, Uxmal, and Chichén Itzá, for example, fit into each other and hang together. Similarly, in Petén, to the south, he shifts the pieces about and finds that Uaxactún, Tikal, and Nakum hang together; and extending his work in this region he connects them in turn with Copán and Quiriguá, still farther south, and with Yaxchilán, Piedras Negras, and Palenque to the west. Thus he has two sections of his picture fairly complete: in northern Yucatán, the “New Empire”; in Guatemala, the “Old Empire.” His next step, naturally, is to explore the intermediate jungles, in southern Yucatán, for the pieces that connect the two sections. These he has been finding in such sites as Río Bec, though the connection is still tenuous.

However, from Copán and Quiriguá through Petén to northern Yucatán the main outlines of the picture are by now fairly clear. The Old Empire came first, and was ended by a cultural migration northward from Petén that resulted in the establishment of the New Empire in Yucatán. The

pieces now connect all the way through, from south to north.

But what about the highlands of Guatemala, south of Petén, the region of what the archaeologist, compromising on a hyphen, calls the Maya-Quiché culture? When Don Pedro de Alvarado, sent out from Mexico by Cortés to conquer Guatemala, first penetrated this region, he found warlike kingdoms with a highly developed culture of their own occupying it. The most important of these kingdoms was the Quiché and, since it was necessary to find one name for the lot of them, Quiché has gradually come into use to designate the entire highland culture of Guatemala. The highland Indians, however, spoke (and still speak) a Mayan language, closely related to that spoken by the Mayas of Yucatán, and the forms of their culture were, in the main, closely akin to the Yucatecan. They worshiped the same gods and lived by the same calendar. Hence Maya-Quiché.

But the hyphen only begs the question. What, specifically, is the historical connection between this highland Maya and the classical Maya of the lowlands to the north? The question is embarrassing to the archaeologist, for the only answer he can give at present is to scratch his head. Or he may guess that, on the break-up of the Old Empire, not all the culture went north; some of it took refuge in the mountains to the south and became the hyphenated culture that still exists today. But there is no evidence. Until the past few years, not one of the connecting pieces between Petén and the highlands had been found. Then, almost by inadvertence, as the result of constructing a football-field on the outskirts of Guatemala City, some

pieces of pottery identical with those from Uaxactún, in Petén, were uncovered. This dramatic and unexpected find has encouraged archacologists and given an impetus to the search for the lost pieces in the picture-puzzle that would connect the Maya-Quiché with the classical Maya.

That is why a special importance attaches today to the region where the Salinas and the Pasión Rivers join together. The Salinas drains the highlands of Guatemala and is, presumably, one of the arteries through which culture flowed between Petén and the highlands. Along its banks, and especially at such a junction as this, is the logical place to explore for the lost pieces in the puzzle.

When the Carnegie Institution expedition came through here, it spent four days exploring a site called Altar de Sacrificios on the left bank of the Pasión, less than a mile from its mouth. One of the results of this exploration I have in the form of a little map showing three groups of structures and a number of stelae and altar-stones covering about a tenth of a square kilometer.

Our purpose seemed simple enough in itself. We had decided to spend one scant day looking over the area covered by the map and exploring beyond its margins for whatever we might find. Since the map had been made, however, a good part of the river-bank in the vicinity of the site had been cleared for *milpas*, revealing ruins of apparently unlimited extent. As far as we could see along the south shore of the river, great pyramidal mounds rose up at intervals against the sky, while our map included only some four hundred and twenty meters of this frontage. The



river, shifting its course during the centuries, had cut deeply into some of the mounds, and large potsherds projected everywhere from the vertical cross-sections that had been exposed by this process.

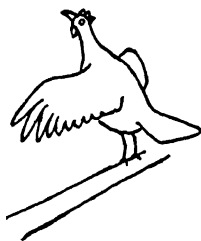
Selecting one such mound at random, we nosed the boat into it and made fast to the limb of a tree. Tom stood up and prepared to step ashore, when something inexplicable occurred. He swayed on his feet, threw out his hands to recover his balance, and an instant later fell over backwards into the river with a torrential splash. Epifanio and I rushed to the spot, grappled for him, and recovered him from the swirling waters. It was one of those solemn occasions that call for laughter, but Tom was worried. If his Ingersoll wrist-watch were ruined, that would be no great loss. But the cigarette-lighter, nicknamed *Morcillo* after the horse Cortés had left behind him in Tayasal, was a different matter. Ever since our departure from civilization *Morcillo* had served to astonish the innocent natives. Wherever we went, Tom gave away cigarettes right and left for the sole pleasure of flashing his contraption under the noses of the bewildered beneficiaries. Their usual response was to take a quick step backwards and eye *Morcillo* from a safe distance. Then, recovering their poise, they would step forward and, with an encouraging word from Don Tomás, suck the little flame into their cigarettes. *Morcillo* was more than just a cigarette-lighter. It was a symbol of our superiority and a link with the world of science to which we belonged. It was civilization itself. Now *Morcillo* had got wet, and Tom gloomily recalled how a sister-lighter, belonging to his room-mate in college, had never recovered from a similar experience in a bath-tub. Since Tom has a

peculiar faculty for forming attachments to inanimate objects, he was particularly affected by the disaster. Also, he was wet and had lost face with our boatman. By good fortune, however, both Morcillo and Tom recovered shortly, and the only ultimate result of the ducking was a good story that spread from Epifanio to Alberto, and thence to the population of the Usumacinta drainage. A new topic of conversation had been introduced into the region.

For a couple of hours we attacked the problem of archaeology energetically and with a will, but we got nowhere with it. Under the blazing heat of the sun and the relentless attacks of mosquitoes, we climbed steep mounds, hauling ourselves up them by branches and creepers, chopped down trumpet trees with our machetes to open up views of the surrounding areas, and tried to match the ruins shown on our map with those that lay all about us. It was a fruitless task. The great pyramidal mounds, covered with low bush, were grouped about large open squares or plazas, one group very much like another, but all of them showing some discrepancy with the groups represented by the map that we held in our hands. Several of the plazas had become waving fields of corn, and we hallooed at random in the hope that one of the local farmers could be found to give us information on whatever stone monuments there were in the vicinity. But our halloos went unanswered. After a couple of hours of beating about the bush we gladly abandoned our exploration for the time being and returned to Trapiche for lunch. In the afternoon the sky filled up and broke, drenching the landscape for hour after hour and canceling the plans we had made for resuming the exploration of

Altar de Sacrificios. Obviously the gods themselves were against any further investigation.

We had, however, been rewarded for our pains, including Tom's ducking, by the discovery that Altar de Sacrificios was a far more extensive site than it was known to be, and this was enough in itself for a couple of sightseers who had no scientific mission. In addition, we got reports of a series of ruins extending back from Aguas Calientes and La Florida all the way to the banks of the Salinas. Thus it was apparent that the whole area must, at one time, have been densely populated, assuming that a good many of the sites were occupied simultaneously.



Don Tomás and I are lounging in our hammocks under the thatched roof of the mill. Outside, the rain is falling, falling, with a steady, unrelenting roar, obscuring the jungle and the river, reducing all the colors of the landscape to its own dispiriting gray. If there are *Morpho* butterflies, howling monkeys, dragonflies, and parrots abroad in this downpour, they are not apparent. For the time being they have been cowed. The rain, which makes all this life possible, now seems bent on making it utterly impossible. It roars against the thatch over our heads and pours in rivulets from the eaves. There is no other sound.

"Let's go and explore the ruins of Altar de Sacrificios," I

say to Tom, looking up from Conrad's "A Personal Record."

"I have a better idea," says Tom. "Let's not," and he buries his nose once more in the pages of "The Brothers Karamazov."

A Frenchman (who else but a Frenchman?) once wrote a book entitled "A Voyage about my Room." He should have had this room of ours to write about—if one can call a roof without walls a room. What a wealth of material he would have found here! In addition to ourselves, there was a host of bedraggled chickens that had come in out of the rain to join us; two turkey cocks and a very wretched turkey hen; a pack of nondescript brown dogs with all the stuffing taken out of their skins and the hair worn off, as though they had been buried and dug up again; a horse; the idle paraphernalia of industry, represented by a great mill-wheel and a crumbling earth-oven that supported a huge iron kettle; our baggage lying open on the ground and containing a disordered array of odds and ends indispensable for a tropical expedition; a small chromium animal called "Mexie," possessed of a soul in good condition, belonging to no recorded species, and destined for honorable service as Tom's lifelong mascot—material enough, surely, for several volumes of travel.

Across the top of the room stretched a horizontal pole that served as a tie-rod for the pole-rafters of the roof. It was considered, by the chickens, a distinctly better-class location for roosting. The problem was to reach it. First it was necessary to take a long flying leap from the brink of the pit containing the mill to the projecting pole that served as a lever for turning it. From here, after a period of fussy

mental preparation, like a nervous diver about to take his first plunge into cold water, a sound chicken might reach another rafter, higher up, by a second and even greater leap. This was as far as the average healthy chicken got, for the last stage, from the rafter to the tie-rod, demanded athletic prowess of an exceptional order. There was evidently only one hen in the lot, a big brown bird with a magnificent chest-expansion, who could make it. But there was another hen—or rather an incipient hen, for she was hardly more than a pullet—who was our heroine. Under-sized and misshapen, she was yet possessed of an indomitable spirit, and she had set herself to reach that tie-rod come what might. Her unremitting efforts distracted us from our reading time and again during the slow course of the afternoon. She would walk endlessly up and down the rafter, studying the various angles from which she might best take flight. At intervals she would crouch tensely, ready to spring and almost springing, but think better of it at the last moment and set off to seek a more advantageous point of departure. The time would come, however, when the attempt had to be made. Suddenly she would explode from her crouching position, wings flailing the air, rise straight up to within clawing distance of the goal, miss her landing, and descend again like a bird that has been shot on the wing, striking the hard-packed earth with an abrupt thump. But her proud spirit remained unshaken by her many falls. Again and again, as the afternoon wore on, she returned to the attack. Again and again, her bosom met the dust.

And finally she made it! At last, when any chicken-hearted chicken would long ago have given up the attempt, she stood on equal terms with the aristocratic brown hen,

looking down upon the common brood below her. She walked out along the pole, as if what she had just accomplished was not worth a moment's thought, and stopped to preen her feathers. Then she settled down on her breast for a well-deserved nap and closed her eyes. . . .

But she was still dissatisfied. This loftiness, it now appeared, was not what she wanted after all. Opening her eyes and rising to her feet again, she began to examine her surroundings. There, below her . . . that rafter was the real chicken-heaven! She estimated the distance carefully, crouched, and leaped out into space with beating wings. But she had estimated wrong, and again, with a familiar thump, she bounced off the hard earth floor. "Cluck!" she said in surprise, picking herself up, and once more she began eyeing the tie-rod from below.

Of the three turkeys that shared our home, two were gobblers and, being gobblers, considered themselves rivals. But there was, fortunately for one of them, no overt hostility. This one was a badly blighted bird with half his tail-feathers missing and pitiful wattles. The other was a king. His breast was broad as a stallion's, its feathers burnished like precious metal. His tail might have served to fan an emperor. One enormously fleshy blue wattle, so ugly that it was fascinating, drooped over his beak and hid it completely. His neck was blue and covered with loose tubercles that would have been skin-disease on any other fowl, his eye had the expression of age-old pride and malignancy. He had, evidently, become obsessed with the notion that he was a steam-locomotive and did everything he could to live up to it. His feathers all ruffled to increase his size, his tail spread, his head drawn back against his body, he marched about

in one corner of the room, momentarily starting forward rapidly and producing the sharp hiss of escaping steam. Then he would stretch forth his neck and gobble in applause. The other turkey cock, with what little equipment he had, attempted the same role, strutting in the shadow of his rival, spreading the tail that was only half there, and answering each hiss and gobble with his own pitiful mimicry.

But the hen, to whom this game might have meant something, was in no condition to care. Her leg hurt, no matter what she did. But the greatest agony came when she attempted to hobble on it, so for the most part she lay on her side and suffered till one of the curs, coming too close, forced her to get up and move.

The curs, as wretched in spirit as they were in body, slunk about the edges of our quarters with lowered heads, pushing their noses into odd corners and snuffing against the dirt. They were all of a uniform tan color, and in their loose skins resembled the cadaverous victims of a Chinese famine. Great open sores stood out on their bodies. These dogs, here, were no different from the innumerable dogs that hang around any of the other settlements. I don't think they are ever fed, but they roam about the precincts of humanity on the off chance of picking up a scrap when no one is looking. Whenever, in this process, they inadvertently come within range of a human foot, they are sent flying, and then their squeals are enough to make one's blood run cold. We asked, at several places, why the dogs were tolerated at all, and were told that they were indispensable for hunting.

The chief features of our quarters, the mill and the oven,

have been described. They seemed already to be on the way toward that state of ruin in which an archaeologist of the future may someday find them. It is not difficult to anticipate his conjectures on their use. The mill-wheel is obviously a circular altar, typical of its period, and the oven a great incensario for burning incense before it. They undoubtedly belong to an intrusive culture-complex that succeeded the Mayan in this region and may have been responsible for its extinction.

It is not to be thought that, because I mention him last in this travelogue, Mexie (who has a soul) is the least important. I mention him reluctantly, however, because he

has such a special kind of soul that I despair of doing justice to it. Besides, Tom is jealous of Mexie's good name, and unless I am guarded in what I say about him I shall have to answer for it. Mexie, then, is about four inches tall, sturdily built of the very best bronze and plated with chromium. His legs are very short (he is quadruped), his neck



long and reptilian, but vertical. He has no ears, but he displays a magnificent array of teeth in a perpetual smile. This smile, it should be added, only serves to disguise his soul, which is inscrutable. Whenever we broke camp, Mexie was the last item (if one may call him an item) to be packed, and whenever we made camp he was always the first to be unpacked. In camp he occupied a position of honor equivalent to the mantelpiece in civilized society. In one case it was the stump of a tree. Here, at Trapiche, a flaw in one of the wooden posts supporting the roof served him as a niche. Perhaps Mexie's most notable single feature,



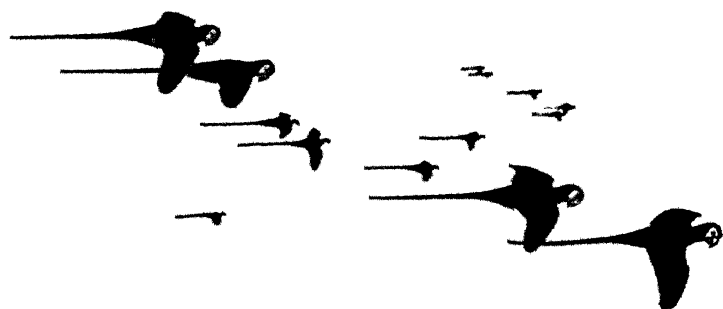
however, was his spiritual superiority to his immediate surroundings. Like an oriental mystic, he appeared always to be completely unconscious of his environment, and though Tom has undoubtedly a more solid foundation for his worship, it was this that aroused my highest regard. He was the only one of us who remained unaffected by the utter misery of our surroundings at Trapiche.

Finally the light began to fail and it was time for us to bestir ourselves. Tom, who had taken charge of the culinary department, went into the hut to superintend the cooking of our supper. It had stopped raining and the solid canopy of cloud overhead was rapidly disintegrating, revealing patches of radiant blue beyond. The landscape still dripped, but now, once again, it was populated. Howling monkeys sounded off nearby. Birds twittered, squeaked, and lisped, hopping about in the foliage or darting out over the flowing river after insects. Some half-dozen macaws were perched in a large open-work tree behind the house, with more coming in to it every moment. They came from every point of the compass, generally in pairs, with such frequency that at times the sky was like a gigantic cartwheel, its spokes made up of macaws coming in to their roost at the hub. I began to count the birds in that one tree alone and got beyond seventy before I finally gave it up.

Not far away was a large dead tree of which only the trunk and some of its main branches were left standing. At the edge of a great ragged hole high up on the trunk, two macaws were perched, displaying before each other. They spread their long scarlet tails against the wood, opened their multicolored wings like rainbows over their backs, ruffled up all their feathers, and struck at each other with

gaping beaks. Occasionally one would succeed in dislodging the other, which would flutter down from the hole, wheel, and return to the assault with raucous cries. Meanwhile more and more macaws were coming in from all over the sky, clamoring as they flew. . . .

Then Alberto and Epifanio had supper ready, and by the time we had finished eating it was full night.





## CHAPTER VIII

THE LITTLE DAUGHTER OF Don Pioquinto Aguilar was having a *fiesta* all by herself on the river-shore. Standing in one of the dugouts moored to a stake at the landing, she dipped water out of the river in a half-gourd and emptied it over her head, so that it drenched her black tresses and streamed down her naked brown body, making it glisten in the first sharp rays of the sun. *Pobrecita*—poor child! What a tale of woe one could build up about her!—yet here she is, as happy, I am sure, as any princess. Father sick, mother sick, doomed to live all her life under conditions that would be shocking anywhere but in a penal colony—yet she is obviously enjoying a splendid time! She swings the dripping gourd up high overhead with both arms and upsets it suddenly, taking herself by surprise. Now that she has seen us she is laughing, so that we may know of her pleasure and share it. Her smile is shy but radiant, displaying a set of gleaming teeth that the most expensive dentist could hardly improve.

Of course, the little daughter of Don Pioquinto is not properly nourished. She will never grow fat, she will never

have the energy of a civilized club-woman. But she does, nevertheless, appear to be happy. It is that way with all these people, or almost all of them. I know very well that we who enjoy hot-and-cold running water and decide the fate of nations over cocktails every afternoon at five should remodel society to give them the advantages that are ours. We can discount their apparent happiness, for here is a case where bliss is ignorance, and ignorance must surely be stamped out.

This must be done, of course. I quarrel only with those who assert there are rational grounds why it must be done. To me it seems there is a destiny in all large and powerful groups of men that requires them to make over other peoples in their own image. When Don Pedro de Alvarado first came to this country, it was his mission to wean the natives from their own barbarous beliefs and customs to the enlightened beliefs and customs of the Christian world, and this he and his successors did largely through fire and the sword. It was a manifest and inescapable destiny. When, a century ago, Western influence first penetrated into the South Seas and tales of naked pagans found their way into New England drawing-rooms, missionary societies were immediately organized and enlightened ladies, themselves dressed in countless yards of fabric, contributed their pennies to the end of putting decent cotton clothes on the savages. That their pennies also brought social diseases, exploitation, and degeneracy to the islanders was beside the point. Again, it was something that had to be.

And today? Today, in an age of materialism, our emphasis is on improving the material conditions of life, both at home and abroad. But the motive, the age-old impulse, has not changed. Our enlightened fellow citizens of today

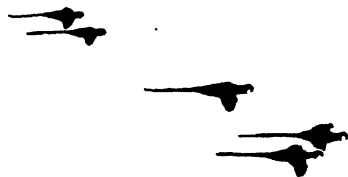
are every bit as enlightened as those of a century or four centuries ago, and their zeal just as great. To them the condition of the *chicleros* of Petén or the Indians of the highlands is no less shocking than was that of the Polynesians to their great grandparents of a century ago. That note in the voice of the tourist complaining that the Indians don't wear shoes always seems strikingly familiar to me. And these would-be reformers make out a very good case for reform too. But they must not think that their purpose is laid down by reason and humanitarianism, and that in increasing the material comforts of the outlander they are acting only for his happiness. Happiness, as the poets know, has little to do with material comforts. A peon, living unshod in the jungle, may actually display more of that elusive quality than a factory-worker with shoes on his feet, a minimum wage, and a brick house. Nevertheless, because we Europeans are shod and live in brick houses, so must the Indians. They must be converted, they must be civilized, they must be taught to accept our own brand of enlightenment. So be it!

Meanwhile the little daughter of Don Pioquinto stands naked at the edge of the jungle and thinks of nothing but to splash water over her body in the early-morning sunshine. The present, at least, is fun, and it is in the present she lives. Ten days ago, when Tom and I were still in touch with the world, we followed the hourly reports of a European crisis that might, at any moment, plunge the civilized world into warfare. For all we know now, war may have been raging in both hemispheres and over all the oceans ever since we left Flores. Possibly we may emerge again, when we do emerge from this wilderness, into the new world of chaos that was already threatening

at our departure. It is something we must think about anxiously, for our own lives are bound up in it and there is no escape.

Not so with the little daughter of Don Pioquinto, who bathes by the riverside. Her world is small, her future simple. To sustain life, if possible, by labor, and to perpetuate it—that is the sole end of her existence. If she gets sick she may die, as she will eventually in any case. If she survives, she will be ready in a few more years to carry on the simple functions of womanhood. Some Alberto or Epifanio, navigating the river that flows eternally past her door, will take her with him and establish her in a new home of her own, where she will bear children, bake *tortillas*, and raise poultry—whatever may happen in the great outer world from which no echo penetrates here. She will, of course, endure her share of the suffering that is the lot of the daughters of Eve. But I doubt that she will ever know the moral uncertainty that is ours. Her ills will never be hypochondriac. She will never realize the anguish of indecision. She will never suffer from nervous-breakdown, nor weigh the alternatives of a sea-voyage or suicide. The worst that can come to her is death, which comes to us all, and she will not find that hard. Barbarous superstition and ignorance will help her to bear the predestined ills of our common humanity. And I daresay that when she does die it may be said of her that she has given her life to the fulfillment of her natural function on earth, as the colonel's lady, who is her sister under the skin, has not. Yet civilize her we must, and the colonel's lady, who believes that all felicity consists in being the lady of a colonel, will gladly contribute her pennies to this end.

Hardly were we out of sight of the little brown girl bathing in the brown waters of the Río de la Pasión, when we emerged into the swifter flood of the Río Salinas. On our left, now, was Mexico, on our right, Guatemala. But there was no perceptible difference between the two republics as we saw them at either hand; both were towering, unbroken forest, revealing nothing of distinctive nationalities. The river separating them was swifter and, possibly, a bit wider than the Pasión, broken by shallows which, at one point, became mud-bars. The little whirlpools that it carried on its surface were commoner and more turbulent. At a *vivienda* opposite the mouth of the Pasión we stopped briefly to salute Mexico and collect our laundry; then we were off again, sweeping down the swift current in company with bands of scarlet macaws that flew in parallel lines along both banks, occasionally showing their disrespect for national boundaries by crossing over from one side to the other.



It was not on our program to be the luncheon guests of an English gentleman, but the unexpected happened. Of Don Juan Reynolds we had heard merely that he was an Englishman who had settled, long ago, on the banks of the Salinas somewhere below the mouth of the Pasión. We came upon his estate at midday—one bush-hut visible from the river where the right bank rose steeply to a crest.

The men nosed the *Lucicita* into the bank and made her fast.

"'Ola, Don Juan!" Epifanio called aloft, his head bent back, his hand cupped to his mouth. "'Ola . . . 'ola . . . !"

The figure of an elderly man, dressed like any other native in a sort of pyjama-shirt and trousers, appeared at the brink of the slope and waved a feeble but unmistakable greeting to us below.

Tom and I introduced ourselves as soon as we had climbed to his level.

"*Entre la casa, Señores,*" the old man murmured in a lifeless voice. He indicated the way by lifting one hand, and stood aside to let us precede him.

The hut was of the simplest description: merely a picket-fence bounding a rectangular area of beaten earth and supporting a palm-thatched roof of four slopes. What was striking about it, in contrast to all other native huts we had entered, was its austere, monastic bareness and its immaculate neatness. One would have thought Don Juan had expected visitors from abroad and prepared for them. The earth-floor had been swept clean, and even the cobwebs that should have rounded off the corners were missing. For furniture the room had a cloth hammock hanging diagonally across it, two home-made wooden chairs, and a packing-box serving as a table against one wall. Above this table, the wall flaunted a few North American magazine-covers and cigarette-advertisements, all of ancient date. There was nothing else—not even so much as a fly-speck.

John Reynolds himself is, close up and on second glance, a man of surprisingly distinguished appearance. Just past middle-age (which in this part of the world means old), he



is of medium height and build, clean-shaven, blue-eyed, white-haired, and very nearly toothless. Like most of the older inhabitants of these parts, who have, down the long years, withstood as best they can the cumulative ravages of dysentery and malaria, he speaks and moves in the manner of a convalescent, as though deliberately economizing what little energy is his. But the distinction is there, nevertheless. Both Tom and I agreed, afterwards, that nothing in his presence, except the lack of teeth, would have prevented him from passing, in more exalted surroundings, for an English Cabinet Minister, exceptionally weary, to be sure, with the weight of public office. It might have been that the sheer pressure of government-business had impelled him to forego the habitual week-end holiday out of London.

We had taken it for granted that our host would respond to the discovery of our nationality by speaking to us in English, but he continued, as he had begun, in Spanish, courteously offering us the choice of his hammock and two chairs to sit down and rest ourselves.

"I suppose you speak English?" I said, finally, when we were all three seated.

"Yes," he answered slowly, looking directly at me, while hesitating and seeming to feel for the words, "but it is a long time since I have had any occasion to use it." He spoke perfectly, of course, just like any member of the government-bench cautiously answering an interpellation in the House of Lords, but as though afraid he might be using the unfamiliar syllables incorrectly. His hesitation, and his way of scanning our faces as he spoke, indicated plainly that he looked for some sign from us to show him that he was really speaking a comprehensible language, not mere gibberish. When it became evident to him that he was,

his hesitation passed off quickly; but even so, to the end of our visit he occasionally groped in vain for a simple word and had finally to resort to the Spanish.

We asked him questions, naturally—how long he had been in the country, how he had happened to come to it, where he had come from . . . Then, to end a pause and keep the conversation going, he found a question to ask us about our world. "How," he said, "are conditions in South Africa nowadays?"

Neither of us answered immediately. The question was perfectly simple, asked more for conversational purposes than for specific information. But we were both taken by surprise, and looked at each other to see who should answer. Why, particularly, South Africa?

"All right, I suppose," Tom finally said. "We don't get much news from that corner of the world."

Don Juan must have noticed our momentary bewilderment, for he immediately made his question specific. "Are the Boers causing any more trouble there?" he asked.

So that was it! The completeness of the old man's isolation struck us both simultaneously. When John Reynolds had left civilization, well over thirty years ago, the Boer War had been the chief object of world-attention. Now, like another Rip van Winkle, he spoke to us out of a past that antedated our own births by many years, and that was known to us only from history-books and musty tradition.

"The Boers haven't been heard from for years," I ventured. . . . "There's been a big war in Europe since that time."

"Yes," he answered disinterestedly, "so I heard." His tone and manner were such as to make the whole world of our civilization, of imperial rivalries and emergency meas-

ures and tense diplomacy, seem as remote as the Punic Wars or the destruction of Troy. The most immediate world-problem of which he had any knowledge was how Britannia would succeed in the subjugation of the Boer Republic!

John Reynolds came to America as a young man, about the turn of the century. He was not a country boy at all, having been brought up in the St. James's district of London—a poor preparation, I should think, for life on the banks of the Salinas. He went out, first of all, to one of the middle-western states, Wisconsin or Michigan, where he had an uncle. I take it that his was a roving restless disposition, for the United States was still a land of abundant opportunity in those days and nothing prevented his settling down in it. Instead, however, he took a job with a banana company and was sent south to its plantations on the Bay of Campeche. Shortly thereafter he bought an interest in a mahogany company that operated up the Usumacinta River and its tributaries, and, abandoning bananas, began to devote himself to mahogany. But the company operated in shallow financial soundings, and when it finally foundered John Reynolds, still a young man, was left stranded here on the banks of the Salinas River. Not only had he lost all his savings in the wreck, but he had added to his responsibilities the burden of a dusky woman and the brood she had borne him.

It is an old tale and a long tale, this history of all the hopeful young men who have at one time or another been employed in remote parts of the world and stranded there when their employers failed or they lost their jobs. Unpleasant as his situation was, it would still have been easy

enough for John Reynolds to break his ties, to paddle down the river to the Gulf, to return to civilization. Most men would have had no hesitation, and casual native families have been deserted with far less cause. A civilized white man does not ruin his chances in life, his life itself, for such things. But it is just here that the special character of the man shows. John Reynolds, of London, England, could not return to civilization with an Indian consort and children; neither could he bring himself to abandon them at the nearest settlement on the banks of the river, however much he strove with his conscience.

I repeat Don Juan's history here as he told it to us. But the manner of telling is worth noting. He did not make an heroic recital of it, nor did he respond to questions on our part like a celebrity being interviewed for the press. We were curious, of course, and at the start must have asked some question that prompted him to mention the circumstances in which he had left England. This aroused our interest further and led to further questions. He spoke in a gentle and sometimes wistful accent of these old times, and his language was faultless. One judged, from his speech, that he could not have come below the middle-class in the city of his origin. From this one may go on to speculate as one pleases. Life in England, one recalls, was extraordinarily tame in the twilight of the great Victorian era. The more adventurous of the young men who came to maturity in those days had to go east to India, for the most part, to find an outlet for restlessness. But a post in India ordinarily required the discipline either of the army or of the civil-service. John Reynolds was, I gather, already sowing his wild oats in the western world when the prospective Anglo-Indians of his generation were toiling at Cambridge

and Sandhurst. However it may have been, he came west to America to seek his fortune or make his career.

Up to the point in his history at which he was left stranded with his half-savage Pocahontas and their children on the banks of the Salinas, Don Juan spoke without emotion, except for the slight wistfulness in his voice, and without gestures, contributing his bit to the social intercourse between us without bravado. But now, as he recalled his early years on the river, he indulged in a single gesture that, coming from him, had the eloquence of a sobbing chord falling suddenly into the midst of a tranquil symphonic movement. He lifted his hands from his lap and wrung them, still with the same characteristic economy of movement, as if he were deliberately restraining himself to conserve his energy.

"Mind you," he said, "I was half crazy all that time, trying to break away. I couldn't sleep at night for thinking of how to manage it. Time and again I made up my mind that I would desert—but the children were still small then, and I couldn't, I just couldn't! I kept thinking I would go completely mad if I didn't get away soon. . . ." He paused a moment, as if the effort of recollection were painful to him, and then his eyes became vacant. "Well," he continued, "I got over it after the first few years—ten or fifteen, I should judge. But that was a bad time. I was getting older and knew it, and finally I was too old to start afresh, even if I had had the chance. I just got used to things being as they were."

We asked him whether he ever thought, even now, of returning to England if he could, whether he thought he might still have any family or friends left over there.

"Even if I did have," he answered in his quiet, wistful

voice, "I shouldn't want them to see me like this, the way I am now." He lifted his hands from his sides as if displaying to us what he took to be the ruin of a man.

A robust and handsome mestizo boy—nineteen years old, as we later learned—came to the door and, waiting till the old man looked up at him, asked in Spanish for instructions about some matter or other. Don Juan introduced him to us as one of his sons.

"He's a strong boy, and intelligent, and a good worker," he said to us in English, "but he hardly knows how to read and write, though I tried to teach all of them a little."

When the boy had gone, with additional instructions to his mother that there would be guests for luncheon, Don Juan revealed what was his sole remaining ambition in life. He did not want his sons to stagnate here, on the river, after he was dead, as he had for most of his life. Instead, he dreamed of moving to La Libertad and setting them up in a little piece of property there, where they would have some chance in life. His sons, who were strong and intelligent, must not be denied all opportunity to better their miserable lot. And as he talked of this one last hope, it became evident that the old man cherished in his imagination the most glowing picture of life on the savannas of Petén! To us, coming from the large world outside, La Libertad had seemed a pitiful and rather absurd frontier-settlement. From here, beyond the frontier, from the point of view of a man who had once been homesick for London, it now appeared as the glittering metropolis.

But it was obvious, even to John Reynolds, that as the years passed he was getting no nearer to the fulfillment of this last ambition. To migrate to La Libertad he would need money, far beyond what he could earn here by any

means at his disposal. Solely to obtain the necessary cash, he operated a small *trapiche* and sold *panela* to natives up and down the river. But he could never get payment in anything but "silver" (the colloquial term for Mexican money, which is considered relatively worthless). If only they would pay him in "gold" (good Guatemalan currency), he told us, he would still be able, in time, to carry out his design. But he was old and knew himself that he had not so much longer to live.

A short stone's throw behind the bush-hut overlooking the river was another that served as cook-house and dining-room. Here the three of us sat down to lunch at a board table, while an obscure old Indian woman leaned over the cooking-fire at one end of the room, her grizzled head wreathed in smoke. This was, presumably, the woman for whom John Reynolds had long ago sacrificed a career and buried himself alive in the wilderness. She came up to the table and set the food before us silently, returning immediately to her place at the fire. The language in which her man was conversing with the unexpected visitors could not but have sounded strange to her ears. She had rarely, if ever, heard him speak it, I suppose. But didn't she also feel the pang of an old jealousy at this intrusion, into their isolation, of the outside world that had once called him so persistently to leave her? Though one must assume that with her Indian reticence she would never have spoken of it to anyone, it is likely that she, too, lay awake on those nights when her lord and master could not sleep for thinking, and watched over him, and waited for her sentence. What memories of anxiety, I wonder, did our visit recall to her? But she remained like any other Indian woman, im-

passive and mechanical in her movements, betraying nothing of surprise or remembrance.

Luncheon over now, Don Juan took us out to see the rest of his establishment. Behind the cook-house, a mound rose sharply, its artificial symmetry revealing that it was a Mayan structure, one of those earth-platforms such as were originally constructed to support houses or temples. On top of this Don Juan had built a thatch-shelter without walls to which his family could retire at high water. For occasionally, when the rainy season was on, the river would rise fifty or sixty feet from its normal level in the course of a single night, and then he would wake to find his dwelling-house and cook-house, high as they were on the steep bank, engulfed. After the first such experience, he had raised this emergency shelter as a place of refuge in future floods.

Off a little way, surrounded by growing cane, was the *trapiche*, indistinguishable in design and construction from that at the mouth of the Pasión, but far different in that everything was clean and in good working order. Another son of the house, robust and good-looking like the first, was attending to some repairs of the machinery.

In a clearing that was bounded on three sides by the residence, the *trapiche*, and the cook-house respectively, several sleek head of cattle took their ease under leafy fruit trees. This was a surprise to us, for we had seen no other cattle along the rivers. When we asked Don Juan how he would transport them if he should someday move to La Libertad, he merely pointed with one hand extended stiffly like a knife at the edge of the jungle, presumably in the direction of La Libertad, and said: "I shall cut a path for them and drive them"—just as if that were the simplest



matter in the world. Though forty-five bird-line miles of unexplored and uninhabited jungle separated him from the goal, though he had neither compass nor map, he would unhesitatingly plunge into this unbroken wilderness, with all the unfordable streams and impenetrable swamps that it might hold, relying on that obscure and, to us, incomprehensible instinct by which the native finds his way and which, it seems, even a Londoner can acquire in time.



As quickly as we had cast off from shore, the flowing river caught hold of us and bore us down, till a bend in its course cut off our last view of the solitary hut high on the crested bank. The river flowing again, the river flowing eternally. What it must be like to live out a lifetime at the brink of such a flow as this, aware that day and night, sleeping and waking, seeing and unseeing, this vast body of water slips down its groove into the sea without ever a break in its continuity, I find myself unable to conceive. To think alone how many oceans this water might have filled and refilled, what vast reservoirs of rain it must have drained, in all the long years past, with the Boer War unfought and Christ unborn and the red man himself not yet come to America—or to think only of the weight of water that has passed this point in a single night while we slept—floods and overwhelms the imagination altogether. Is it possible that man could ever put his own personal impress to anything of such unimaginable magnitude, so independent, impersonal, and inhuman?

You would think not. The men who have, like Don Pioquinto and Don Juan, lived on the banks of the river

in historic times have done nothing to adapt their wild environment to human needs beyond clearing a few negligible acres here or there for corn or cane. Nothing that they themselves have done shows in our present view, which, beside the everflowing water, embraces only a great tangled growth of uncultivated vegetation such as doubtless existed indifferently before and after the coming of man. Yet the river is not at all the same, really, as if man had never been. Not Don Pioquinto and Don Juan, but the great masses of men to the south who have never seen the river, have altered its character. The effects of European civilization, alien to this continent, are visible even here in total wilderness.

Four centuries is hardly a perceptible instant in the life-history of such a stream as this. Nevertheless, when Cortés crossed it on his march from Mexico to Honduras, it was not the dirty flow it is now. His men, replenishing their water-supply from its surface, dipped out water that was, presumably, fresh and pure and transparent, like spring-water running through sand and gravel, like the water of the Arroyo Subín today. Though it may occasionally have overflowed its banks during the rainy season, it is certain that it never flooded to the point where it rose fifty or sixty feet in a night to engulf even such a vantage-ground as that on which Don Juan had staked out his kingdom. This murkiness and this flooding are so definitely evidence of recent human activity that had Columbus first come upon the New World at some point on this river, and found it as it is now, any expert in his party could have told him categorically that the land was humanly populated, though no human face or footprint had yet been seen. He could have done more, for, reasoning from the

color of the water alone, he could have told Columbus that the population was organized into a large-scale and sedentary society with a caste-system, that it practiced a highly developed form of agriculture, that it knew how to work metal, and that it had towns and markets where it indulged in trade. Only large-scale human vandalism at its head-waters could so affect this stream.

No river-water runs murky like this except where it carries the wastage of human civilization. That silt, which is so thick in the flowing river that if I strain the water through my fingers they remain powdered with it, is the fine agricultural soil of the Guatemalan highlands that, having once been used to grow corn or pasture, is now left to go down this drain into the ocean. Already large areas of these once fertile highlands are gullied and barren of arable soil, and if the process of erosion continues the whole region will in time come to resemble the deserts of North Africa and Mesopotamia and the bleak landscapes of exhausted China. It is as if the life-blood of this robust and fertile earth were being poured away, streaming from all the open sores men have scratched on its body. The unimaginable weight of water that each year goes to swell the oceans returns each year in the form of rain to fertilize what remains of the land, but the uncounted tons of rich soil sink to the ultimate wilderness of the ocean-bottom and never return. When they are gone they are gone, and neither man nor deity will ever fish them up again.

John Reynolds, who lives here to all appearances independent of human civilization, nevertheless has a stake in this civilization. When the river rose fifty or sixty feet in a night and flooded him out, he may have thought the event an act of God, a natural phenomenon. Actually it

was an act of man, a purely human phenomenon, and he would have been in order had he petitioned the government of Guatemala to take steps to abolish the public abuses that resulted in his private catastrophe. For the flood was the product of human negligence just as surely as if a great dam had been wantonly breached.

Before the highlands were laid bare by Indian farmers who planted their corn on slopes so steep that you can, standing on them, touch the ground almost without stooping, before sheep were introduced to nibble the grass down to the naked soil, the heavy rain that fell on the highlands seeped into the ground through the innumerable pores opened by natural vegetation and was absorbed into innumerable roots that held it in storage as effectually as if it had actually been dammed. The rivers received the waters of a heavy rainfall only indirectly, through slow seepage over a long period. Where the soil has now been stripped of the protection of its natural vegetation, however, the rain is no longer retained but pours off the bare slopes in torrents, carrying the topsoil along and swelling the rivers overnight. Then the brown water flowing past Don Juan's door rises swirling while he sleeps and takes him by surprise even on the high pinnacle that he has chosen for his habitation. The simple reason why so few points along these rivers are safely habitable is that the Indians of the far-off highlands practice such an advanced form of agriculture with so little foresight.

The color of the water may be the only change wrought by man that is immediately visible to us, but the matter does not stop there. One may reasonably suppose that predatory fish which were adapted to hunting their living in clear water have been unable to survive in murky water

that hides their quarry; some species have consequently increased at the expense of others; the change in the balance of piscine life has undoubtedly brought a change in the balance of reptiles—turtles and crocodilians—that live, directly or indirectly, on fish; the change in the proportions of the various forms of animal-life has changed the proportions of the vegetable forms on which the animals feed. Again, kingfishers which live on fish must have been handicapped in their struggle for survival by the darkening of the waters; and hawks that live in part on kingfishers must also have been affected, though indirectly. Eventually, in these endless chains of causation, almost every form of native life must be affected in some degree. A census of biological forms taken now, if it could be compared with some prehistoric census, would undoubtedly show the impact of human civilization, even though that civilization had never directly entered this area. Even here, in the wildest of Central American jungles, you cannot altogether escape the works of man.

In experiencing life directly, it is not always the most interesting and the noblest aspects of experience that have the most force. In retrospect, however, there is an inevitable tendency to distort the complete truth by emphasizing only what is interesting and neglecting what is not. It is much more interesting, for instance, to recall that on such a day we had lunch with a native of London who gave us a fresh awareness of the nobility and suffering of man, than to reveal the mere fact that, in addition to my increasing physical debility, caused by undernourishment and dysentery, I was suffering from a common cold that, having made a good start in my head, had now spread down my

throat to my chest, so that I felt as though my lungs were full of sharp sand and gravel. I was already coughing violently and continually, and in more favorable surroundings I should probably have been prevailed upon to go to bed. I hesitate to mention this here because it is one of those petty facts of existence that lower the whole tone of an adventure-narrative, is out of keeping with the heroic tradition in exploration, and, besides, can be of no possible interest to that exacting patron of arts, the general reader. Nevertheless, it is a fact that loomed particularly large in the actual circumstances. My own personal sensation at visiting Don Juan's establishment, for example, was less one of pleasure at meeting a man who spoke my language than of relief at finding a hammock into which I could, at least for a few brief minutes, quietly collapse. The only reason why I can no longer avoid a statement of the case is that, after our twilit arrival at Tres Naciones, where the Río Lacantún joins the Salinas to form the Usumacinta, I was finally forced to recognize that I had really contracted that scourge of the tropics, malaria.





## CHAPTER IX

**S**MOOTHLY, CONTINUOUSLY, with no change in its pace, with no ruffle of its surface, the river sweeps round the big bend, a heavy mass of brown water moving eternally toward the sea. Minutes and years, darkness or light, it is all one. But for us transients, now carried along on the flow, time is particularized. It is just that moment when the first faint wash of gold, presaging another dusk, appears in the open sky over the jungle and one feels, like a sudden relaxation in the atmosphere, that the day is ending. It is always an excellent time for arrival—and we are just arriving. On the inside of the bend, the right bank, huge old trees stand up out of the smothering level of the lesser vegetation, rising to imposing heights, great cities of branch and foliage sheltering God only knows what population, what hosts of wild and undiscovered denizens. Into this utter wilderness the daylight never more than half penetrates, within it night is always lurkingly present. But on the outside of the bend, on the opposite shore, the river in its eternal course has cut through a hill, leaving exposed a hollow bluff of sun-cracked clay.

Diagonally along its face a steep foot-path rises to the heights above, upon which stand the several bush-huts that compose the human settlement of Tres Naciones. Not bats and crawling things, but our own brothers, creatures of the daylight, live here. These are our fellow men.

The establishment of our host, Alfonso Lopez, is prosperous as such establishments go. Two exceptionally large huts (of which one is promptly made ours) have been fenced off from the hinterland in such a way as to form an open compound whose boundary on the riverside is the brink of the clay bluff. Within the compound reside Don Alfonso, his wife, five children ranging from about three to nine or ten years old, a great rabble of blighted and untouchable curs, and several snorting porkers—these last being the visible measure of Don Alfonso's prosperity.

Don Alfonso himself is a man like us, alien to this wilderness in which he lives. In no other human creature have I seen such eyes. Theirs is that expression of abstract tragedy that is found only in peasants and the higher beasts, the proper expression of an independent intelligence bound eternally to the service of an unindulgent nature. If he had looked at us like the kine of *La Libertad* we should hardly have been surprised. Instead, he met us at the top of the path and immediately drew me off to one side of the compound, importantly, for private consultation. Fellow men! He put his Indian face close to mine and spoke in a low confidential tone: for eleven days now—exactly eleven, he repeated—his woman had been sick. . . . Did I understand? I asked him to give me some account of her illness, to tell me its source and whether she was in any pain. For answer he pressed both his hands against the lower part of his abdomen and looked at me with implor-



ing eyes. She was infirm there. . . . Did I understand? His eyes seemed begging me to gather more than his words expressed. What he wanted of his fellow man in the wilderness was that he should examine her and give her of his medicines! . . .

I promised, of course. But neither Tom nor I had any knowledge of medicine, and I was worried, besides, at not knowing how far I, as medico, would be expected to go in my examination. And I was feeble myself now, terribly tired and lethargical, wanting nothing so much as to lie down. I went into our own hut, the one that had been cleared out for us, and quickly downed a stiff measure of rum before visiting the sick woman in the house next door.

The inside of the hut that sheltered my patient (my first patient) was so dark that, coming out of the fading daylight, it was a moment before I could see properly in it. A cooking-fire smoldered at one side, a woman moving against it. Obscure children and dogs wandered about, got underfoot. At momentary intervals the prevailing stillness of the domestic scene was desecrated by a chilling explosion of squeals, growing gradually weaker, as some dog was sent flying across the room or out the door, tail between legs. The sick woman lay on a mat in the corner to the left of the door, but rose weakly to a sitting position when I came in. She had a beautiful head, wan and as sad as an animal's in its expression, with fine features and especially fine eyes. She could not have been above thirty. Don Alfonso approached her now like an anxious lover, caressing her gently and speaking to her with the utmost tenderness and respect. He pointed me out and explained my presence. I was the doctor. Immediately she addressed herself to me in a feeble but eager voice, as a woman might to a priest

in confession, unburdening herself of the tale of all her ailments. What it amounted to, in sum, was that for the past eleven days she had been suffering from pains in her abdomen accompanied by an extreme degree of flatulence that made her continuously uncomfortable.

I returned to headquarters for consultation with Tom, and together we looked up the section on "Indigestion or 'Biliousness'" in the "Handbook of Travel." It appeared that a cathartic was called for in this case. But a paragraph headed "Danger" warned against mistaking the symptoms of acute appendicitis for those of "Indigestion or 'Biliousness'"—see page 447 for the former. On page 447 we were advised, in urgent italics: "*Do not give a cathartic . . . send for a surgeon if possible.*" At last I returned to the patient with calomel and sodium bicarbonate pills. They, at least, were safe. A half a coconut-shell filled with water was obtained and, under my watchful eye, she took the required dosage in the prescribed manner. I left several additional pills with instructions that they be taken at fixed intervals during the night, explaining what their effect would be. The woman and her husband were touchingly grateful.

In the morning she was feeling recovered—so much so that she was again up and about, though still weak. The symptoms had left her. Don Alfonso was like a man who has just emerged from the valley of the shadow of death. It was not, however, till the moment of our departure, at noon that day, that he brought himself to tell me what he had, for some obscure reason, kept to himself the previous evening. Again, as we were about to leave, he beckoned me to one corner of the compound (like the ghost of Hamlet's father) and, speaking in his low, confidential

voice, his face at close range, his eyes full on mine, he betrayed that it was now exactly twelve days since his woman had suffered a miscarriage. Immensely relieved at what he considered my cure, he did not wish me to depart without knowing.

To Tom belongs all credit as the discoverer of the Río Lacantún. When he came in to report his discovery I was sitting on the high bank overlooking the flowing Salinas. It was that one moment of the day which Moslems dedicate to eternity in the form of the eternal city of Mecca, and which I could wish all civilized peoples would give to a like purpose. In the warm light of the day's finale that scene of wildness and splendor showed at its best: the grand forest opposite, dark except at its edges, and the heavy river coming round the bend like an endless express-train—an express-train passing in perpetuity, as if the powers that be, having dispatched it originally in remote antediluvian ages, had then gone off, leaving no one to mind it, so that it kept on going by itself, endlessly, endlessly, awaiting some further order that would never come now because the office of the chief dispatcher had long been dark and the dispatcher himself dead ages ago. . . . Just so Alfonso Lopez and all the generations of his fellow men persist in the endless toil of working the land for a living, of breeding their kind, of keeping going in perpetuity, because someone once started the process and the original decree has never been countermanded. . . . Birds and butterflies, too, persist in this endless, preordained and unsupervised activity. Some muddy bank must be exposed on the foreshore opposite, for it appears glittering white with a crowd of butterflies such as forms over every fetid

mud-bank in every tropical river. Directly below, too, at the foot of the bluff whose summit I hold in this moment of twilight, is another crowd of the same butterflies. Half are powder-white—like our cabbage butterflies in the north, only larger—and half pale lemon-yellow. But at a little distance the individual particles of color merge and the effect of the whole is of a buoyant shimmering mass, a uniform sparkling white washed by some faint golden reflection. The butterflies dance endlessly with their wings and their dangling mosquito-limbs over the shining mud, and the little swallows perform dervish-dances over the river as though inscribing innumerable whorls and scrawls and arabesques on its steadily moving surface. Butterflies and birds know too much or too little of eternity to express the tragedy of life. It is only their half-knowledge that makes for that hopeless resigned expression in the eyes of men and oxen.

Meanwhile Tom, exploring behind the two houses, has blundered upon the Río Lacantún. Tres Naciones, it appears, is on a high but narrow tongue of land, the elongated point of a wedge just barely holding apart the two rivers and preventing a premature mingling of their waters. Alfonso Lopez's establishment was backed by a patch of the dense tangled scrub characteristic of fallow *milpa*-land. Following in Tom's steps, I found a foot-path that led through it for about a hundred paces to the brink of another sheer escarpment like that fronting the Salinas. Below it flowed an immense flood of muddy water full of whirlpools and ripples that occasionally broke into white edges of foam. Down from the settlement along either waterway, a quarter of a mile or less, but not quite visible from either brink, was the junction that marked the beginning

of the Usumacinta River, the mouth of which lay in the blue sea of the Gulf of Mexico, far away.

Here is a quotation from the notes we had made out preliminary to the expedition: "Next stop (advisable) *Tres Naciones* (c. 6 hours from Altar) to investigate Lacantún River up to ruins of Lorenzo (Maler only report) & find out what's there—poss. stelae. Very imp. region archaeologically as it represents unknown drainage area. Make thorough investigation of conditions c. mouth of Lacantún." That was our program for the following morning.

Maler, referred to in the above note, was an Austrian archaeologist and a character. For a number of years, about the turn of the century, he was almost continuously engaged in exploring the territory from British Honduras through the Usumacinta drainage. His reports, which occupy several folio volumes of the "Peabody Museum Memoirs," are a strange mixture of archaeological measurements (a passion for taking measurements is sometimes the chief qualification of an archaeologist) and adventure-narrative written in a curiously innocent style. The man, in his writings, shows himself alternately a dryasdust pedant and a romantic schoolboy. He is also unmistakably a child of his age and, as such, more easily contemptuous of native shortcomings than we. Of the inhabitants of the Usumacinta region he writes: "It is long since a respectable, stationary population inhabited these fruitful shores, and the dubious elements sunk in sloth, filth, and every possible vice, whose miserable habitations are met with here and there, are constantly shifting since they acquire no fixed property rights." No fixed property rights! There, but-toned up to the chin in its own legality, speaks the 19th

century. The institution of private property having no formally documented standing on these fruitful shores, the natives are, of necessity, dubious elements, not respectable! One gathers that nothing but properly notarized title-deeds will ever rescue them from "every possible vice." O Age of Law Triumphant! Yet Teobert Maler was something of a hero. Those measurements of his, which are, in most cases, the only detailed archaeological knowledge available on the region, were made at the cost of such hard living as few civilized men could endure for a like period, and with a pertinacity (also proper to the age) that never acknowledged defeat.

Maler's last report, the one on Tikal, was issued by the Peabody Museum in 1911 under embarrassing handicaps. Its author, once more in his native Austria, had broken off all correspondence with the museum, to the extent, even, of not sending plans and measurements necessary to the completion of the volume or correcting the proof. I do not know that he has ever been heard from since, and by now, after thirty years of silence, he has probably gone to his grave. But his ghost, I venture to think, still battles against the raging waters of the Usumacinta, still overcomes fearsome odds to take measurements that will no longer find their way to any human eye. One tangible relic is left in Petén. On the walls of the ruined palace at Tikal, among other bits of vandalism, I found scratched into the smooth plaster that neat, almost feminine signature so familiar from his published maps, together with a date: *Teoberto Maler 1895*.

In April of 1900 Maler, having completed seven months of steady exploration during which he gathered the material for his report on the ruins of Yaxchilán, decided to

push on up the Usumacinta to Tres Naciones and, from there, explore the lower reaches of the Río Lacantún. "When my work in Yaxchilán was finished," he writes, "my men were completely discouraged with regard to undertaking further explorations and ardently longed to return to Tenosique. Such is the character of these people that even for the highest wages and with the best treatment, they cannot be induced to continue at one pursuit for any length of time." But such was the character of Teobert Maler that they were induced.

One league (2.63 English miles) up the Lacantún he came upon some ancient rock-carvings and, from indirect evidence, judged that a Mayan city must at one time have existed near this spot. A little over a mile farther up, he found a stone head, which he denotes as coming from the "principal temple of San Lorenzo," crudely carved but similar to representations of the god Kukulcán (Quetzalcoatl) found at Yaxchilán. He progressed another four leagues or so upstream, found nothing further, and finally turned about for the return journey to Tenosique. This, to my knowledge, is the only archaeological exploration that had ever been undertaken on the Río Lacantún.

My companion Mr. Gladwin and I (as Maler might have written it), desirous of acquiring information, that would lead to further discoveries in this important region, inquired among the natives at the mouth of the Lacantún River (a miserable and degenerate lot, dirty and lacking in moral elevation) regarding the possible existence along these luxuriant shores of *ruinas antiguas* or *piedras con figuras o esculturas*. Several responded to our questions by informing us of the existence of a single large stone in the vicinity of the small *rancho* or settlement of San Lorenzo, on the

left bank of that treacherous stream. Though we attempted to elicit information of a more detailed nature, the observation of the natives whom we questioned was so little concerned with the archaeological riches of their own country, that we found ourselves unable to place any credence in it. Far from being able to find common agreement on the exact dimensions of the stone and its weight in kilograms, they were unable to give us the benefit of any general conclusions whatsoever concerning its shape and decoration. The majority of them informed us, that it was circular in shape and had its location in the doorway of a house belonging to one of the miserable inhabitants of the aforementioned settlement of San Lorenzo. They either professed themselves totally ignorant, when we inquired of them as to whether the stone in question bore any delineations of religious significance, or they contradicted each other, some asserting that it did and others denying so. It is a pity that the labors of the archaeologist should be so hampered by the lack of intelligence and industry which characterizes the natives of these fertile regions.



Meanwhile, the last daylight had gone. It was full darkness on the river by the time Tom and I turned in for the night. The heat of the day remained unchanged, however, and lying in my hammock, inside the little hut, I felt as though the burning sunlight were still upon me. Shortly I was seized with my first attack of chills. When the worst of it had passed off, I crawled out from under my *pabellón*.



and unearthed the clinical thermometer from the heap of our belongings. My temperature was slightly over 100° Fahrenheit. A couple of hours later it had already gone above 102° and was, presumably, still rising. By now, though I had wrapped myself like a mummy in two blankets, I was chilled to the bone and shaking like a leaf. My whole chest felt inflamed and raw with the cold, which seemed to have taken possession of my lungs, and I no more dared to unwrap myself and go after the quinine bottle in such circumstances than if it had been a freezing winter's night without. But I knew that the fever must be kept from mounting much higher if I was to escape pneumonia before morning.

Tom's *pabellón* hung almost within reach of mine. I called out to him in the stillness of the night, softly at first, then louder. It was a long time before he began to return to this world. Finally he grunted and moved abruptly.

"Tom, I've got malaria," I said, remaining huddled up like a caterpillar in its own skin. "Do me a favor."

"What ho?" came the mumbled reply from the darkness.

"Tom! Are you awake?"

"What? Is someone calling? . . . Hello, hello!"

"Tom, wake up! Do me a favor and get out the quinine. The quinine, Tom—I want some quinine!"

"Hello there! Yes . . . what ho?"

"Tom! I'm dying! I've got malaria!"

"Malaria! Who?"

"Yes, malaria, *calentura*. I've got a chill. Will you get out the quinine for me?"

"Who did you say?"

"Me. My name is Halle, and I've got malaria."

"All right . . . coming! Hold everything! Be with you in a minute. . . . What was that you said?" Tom, still only half awake, stumbled out from under his *pabellón*, already armed with his flashlight, and went groping about in the direction of our baggage. "I thought you said something about malaria," he said.

"Yes. One-hundred-and-two fever—going up."

Tom was wide-awake, finally. "That's the end of San Lorenzo," he said. "What do we do next? Make a bee-line down river to civilization, or race back to Flores?"

"It's the end of nothing. Let's wait and see in the morning."

"How's your cold?"

"Rotten."

By morning I had sweated out the fever and my temperature was back to normal. But for the next few days I kept myself in a continuous daze by the prodigal application of quinine. Whenever the ringing in my ears began to subside I promptly renewed it with a fresh dose. Until my cold wore off, I preferred the risk of quinine-poisoning to that of pneumonia.

Officially, and according to the notes that I have already quoted, our mission on the Lacantún was archaeological exploration. But, in actuality, there was more to it than that. We were also engaged, with a zeal that at this distance seems disproportionate, on an egg-hunt. You would not think that the ordinary eggs of the domestic hen could ever assume such value as they did for us, yet for us in those days they were more than pearls. It was at San Juan Acul that we had first become addicted to a native beverage called "*punche*," made by the simple expedient of beating

up a raw egg in a cup of coffee. To this we had learned to add, by my own invention, a dash of West Indies rum, to complete a magnificently warming and fortifying drink. Limited as we ordinarily were to a diet that contained bulk with so little actual nutriment that we found ourselves starving on plenty, our taste for *punche* had quickly grown into a powerful obsession. The difficulty was to get eggs. I recall now that it was in this quest alone that we had stopped at Don Juan Reynolds's—but there had been no eggs there. At Tres Naciones, though there were chickens aplenty and, presumably, eggs, we could obtain none because the women of the settlement, with the exception of our ailing hostess, were all hammock-ridden with malaria—and egg-gathering is exclusively woman's work, here as elsewhere. Now the zeal for archaeology that prompted us to ascend the fierce current of the Lacantún was reinforced by infatuation. We were led by the vision of an egg, a lovely celestial white spheroid, that enticed us onward into the heart of the unknown.

The Río Lacantún, constrained by steep banks on either side, rushed down to its meeting with the Salinas as if some dam farther up had just broken and this were the first outpouring of a vast reservoir of water seeking its own level. In the center, where its flow was unimpeded, it traveled smoothly and swiftly, like an immense serpent escaping through a gorge, but it broke and foamed over the roots and logs and branches that crowded into it from either shore. The left bank, though high, was mostly wild jungle, but an almost continuous line of *viviendas* occupied the right bank. Keeping close in to shore on the right bank, the men forced our boat against the current by catching hold with their paddles on all the vines and roots within

reach. Occasionally a paddle slipped and the current bore us back till, by frantic casting about with their paddles, they got a new hold on the shore. In that way, by dint of perseverance, our gains outweighed our losses and we made snail's progress upstream.

San Lorenzo, when at last we came to it, gave us a shock. As if it had, at some time in the past, come loose from its moorings, what remained of the settlement now stood on the left bank a mile or so below the point where Maler had found it almost forty years before. Evenly spaced in a neat row fronting the river were five identical bush-huts that had once been the habitations of men. Now, if they sheltered anything, it was only the creeping, crawling things of the jungle and the restless ghosts of men. The five huts, turned gray with death in the sunlight, were slowly descending to the dust, their roofs bowed inward and riddled, their walls broken from their lashings and leaning in a state of collapse that, apparently, had been momentarily arrested by our advent on the scene and would be resumed when the next bend in the river shut off our view. And as they sank to the ground, a luxuriant screen of fresh new jungle, young and potent, was growing up from the ground to enfold them, to bring them gently down into the dust, to hide them, and at last to obliterate their traces for all time. In this spectral settlement confronting us across the river we saw the answer to the question we had asked ourselves at Trapiche and at Tres Naciones: what happens when at last no one in such a pestilential community is able any longer to keep his feet? As at San Lorenzo, so at these others, the jungle waits outside the frail walls, patiently abiding the time when it will move in and claim its dead.

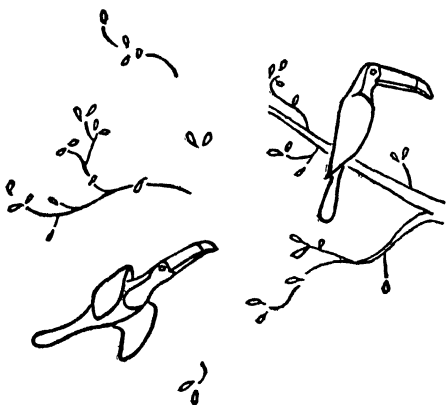
At every *vivienda* on the right bank (three in all) we

stopped to ask for eggs and the services of some man who could guide us to the ancient stone of which we had been told. Only at the third did we meet with success. There we got one solitary egg and a man and boy to guide us to the ruin. Convoyed by the guides in their dugout, we crossed the river and made a landing on the opposite shore at a point about a quarter of a mile above the remains of San Lorenzo. Here we immediately launched a vigorous offensive against the embankment covered with dense jungle that rose steeply before us. Slashing with our machetes like crusaders annihilating the infidel, we soon gained the heights. The top of the bank was an even ridge paralleling the river. Behind it the terrain sloped off to a sort of terrace, the whole having that appearance of regularity and plan, evident also in the five houses of San Lorenzo, that is the mark of human artifice. This was, apparently, an ancient Mayan civic-site, a more glorious San Lorenzo of the far past. But the bush was so dense, after a thousand years, that it was impossible to come to any proper notion of it by a cursory survey. We had time only for the enduring stone that was the object of our search.

We found it without difficulty and promptly set to work to cut away the vines and creepers with which it was almost solidly covered. Still upright against the inland side of the long ridge and facing away from the river, it stood some six feet above the ground and was about four feet in width. The fact that it had not fallen under the dragging weight of vegetation, that it had maintained itself upright for more than a millennium of its existence, was our misfortune as archaeologists. A stone that had succumbed more easily would have stood a better chance of immortality. Flat on the ground with its face pressed into the leaf-mold,

the sculpture originally wrought on its surface by some long-forgotten sculptor with a stone chisel would have been well protected from the elements. Upright as it was, the rain and the wind had had continuous access to its sculptured face, which was by now so eroded that nothing of the original design was recognizable. Like the other stelae of the Usumacinta region, the sculpture had been in low relief on a panel set back into its face. The straight outlines of the panel were still clear, but all the rest was a confusion of human and natural sculpturing. We carefully cleaned and photographed it. That much done, and still carefully cherishing our solitary egg wrapped in a handkerchief, we returned to the boat and, sweeping rapidly past the five dead eyes that looked bleakly down on us from the heights of San Lorenzo, were back in Tres Naciones by midday, ready to continue down the river.





## CHAPTER X

I HAVE HEARD IT SAID, AND always on the highest authority, that on the Well Planned Expedition nothing is ever left to chance. In this respect the Well Planned Expedition differs from life itself as we mortals know it. Adventures—by which is meant mishaps or narrow escapes—do not occur on the Well Planned Expedition. Nothing, in fact, occurs except what has been foreseen and blueprinted in advance. Undoubtedly the immortal gods carry on their activities in much the same way as the leaders of Well Planned Expeditions.

But our expedition was modest. When we had attended to the rudimentary preparations of gathering equipment and what advance information was available, we had still left the knees of the gods heavily burdened. Chance, or fate, remained the preponderant factor. We pushed off into the wilderness, south from La Libertad, as into a thick fog of doubt in which even ascertained facts loomed like questionable appearances. This, it seems to me, is a particularly appropriate point at which to make our acknowledgment to the incalculable element in our enterprise, for

upon our arrival at the field-headquarters of the Agua Azul Mahogany Company it became evident to us that we had, so far, been fortune's favorites.

Recall that one of the greatest hazards of our enterprise lay in the season in which we had, perforce, to undertake it. By any calculation of the probabilities, the skies should have poured rain upon us in torrents, the river should have been a swollen flood raging toward the sea, the sun should have shone upon us only intermittently between storms. In actual fact, it was not so at all. The weather, as if deliberately disregarding established probabilities for our benefit, obliged us extraordinarily. It rained, of course, at times. Occasionally a late-afternoon shower, moving over the jungle, crossed the river at the point where we, too, happened to be passing, and then for a few minutes we would have to take shelter under rubber ponchos. At the mouth of the Pasi3n it had rained all one afternoon. But for the most part the sun shone unremittingly from dawn to dusk, and the river, even fed as it was by the rains of the highlands, remained far below the high-water marks on either bank. The Carnegie expedition, choosing the dry season for its passage, had encountered more rain than we did, and I recall the continuous rains that had fallen on us in northern Pet3n during the dry season of the previous year.

Another hazard was that the Agua Azul Mahogany Company, on which we depended to further our expedition beyond the point where Alberto and Epifanio would serve, might no longer be in existence. Rumors to that effect had been persistent. We foresaw that we might arrive at Agua Azul to find nothing—nothing but the wilderness that waits on the pale of all human enterprise.

Not here, however, not yet. The establishment of the



Blue Water Company (to translate its name) appeared firmly entrenched as we came upon it in the fagging daylight of late afternoon. A drove of cattle enveloped in a cloud of dust that fixed the slanting sunbeams was stampeding up a steep bank from the shore, chased by shouting natives with switches in their hands. A man in a sombrero, dimly seen through the luminous dust, was mounted on a horse at the summit, erect and motionless, like imperishable bronze. Ribbons of smoke curled upward from little bush-huts overlooking the river. Men were moving at the water's edge among a variety of dugouts, calling to each other, carrying out orders. A slender craft from another colony of huts on the Guatemalan shore was being paddled obliquely across the swift current. Here was none of that morose silence of a settlement in which the inhabitants are forever at such close grips with their environment that they can spare no strength for sound. This again was enterprise—the enterprise of European man, who pursues a more aggressive purpose than that of mere survival. Dark and substantial on the high Mexican bank stood a large board building, raised up on posts. It dominated the scene, was obviously the center of this web of activity, the offices of administration. The wilderness was here too, outside the web, up and down river on either hand, but on the defensive. It stood back from human enterprise, passive and unresisting, merely a deposit for plunder, a natural resource, an extensive mahogany-mine. It had to submit to orders from Mexico City, to acknowledge the superior interest of shareholders. For this was not the establishment of Alfonso Lopez or Pioquinto Aguilar, but the field-headquarters of the Agua Azul Mahogany Company, S. A.

Don León Halbeisen, likewise, had little in common with these native settlers. He was Swiss, or Swiss-Mexican, with a full command of the German, English, French, and Spanish languages. He was, moreover, a man after Teobert Maler's heart—a man of property. He had interests, investments, capital. The great trees of the jungle fell at his command. For Don León was captain and half-owner of this ship of Capital Enterprise. There was another, an old English gentleman living out his declining years in the city, who, as senior partner, was co-owner with Don León. He, I gathered, administered the distant machinery of operations in the capital and commanded clerks. But it was Don León who commanded the jungle. The importance this gave him was apparent in the manner, the attitude, the whole aspect of the man. He was small and compactly built, not quite stocky, and walked about in white clothes on the veranda of the administration building with the firm, nervous but confident tread of a little captain on the bridge of his ship. Below him on the river-bank, as in a well-deck, the crew passed busily to and fro, executing assigned orders—his orders. Inside was his bride of a few months, directing the household—his again. She was a pretty Anglo-Mexican girl who had been brought up in Mexico City, the child of English parents, and was seeing this wilderness for the first time, having boldly decided to accompany her husband on one of his periodic visits of inspection. I think Don León was at least a trifle pleased at having her present to witness his Napoleonism in this jungle-outpost, and she a little startled and fearful, a bit on her guard. Who—her eyes seemed to be asking—who was this man she had married?

To Tom and me, arriving from up-river, this establishment

was an oasis of luxury. We had already learned, what is so easily and quickly forgotten, that for our satisfactory subsistence we did not really need shower-baths and chairs for reclining, or a table to eat at, or a board floor beneath our feet, or the kind of environment that calls for dressing before dinner. But now that these things were suddenly ours, we got extraordinary satisfaction from them. We got a bit drunk on them and, I daresay, behaved wildly. Life was no longer ordinary, something to be accepted or endured, but a prodigal gift of the indulgent powers that made this world for our special delectation. To sit in a canvas chair on a good board floor in a board room with windows overlooking the river and unlace our boots, to shed our dirty khaki clothing and stand naked in bare feet on the board floor, to wrap ourselves in clean towels and go out to the corner of the veranda where, in a little closet, the shower-bath had been filled for us by the houseboy, where a cake of soap rested in a little tray attached to the wall, where a portable floor of wooden slats especially designed for us to stand on covered the drain in the floor, and then to pull the chain and feel the cold water fall in a shocking, choking, tingling torrent—what more could heaven itself have to offer?

The Halbeisens were moved and amused at the little things that gave us such happiness, as adults are at the simple pleasures of children. We cut away our beards, scrubbed our faces, combed our hair in front of the mirror as though we were preparing for a court-presentation, and finally, in fresh white ducks and white shirts, made our appearance at the dinner-table. No child, I am sure, ever enjoyed an ice-cream party as we did the four-course dinner of canned soup, canned beans, fried eggs, and bananas, chased with rum and coffee, to which we sat down. What glory to be alive!

From Don León, that evening, we first heard the full story of the two French explorers. Shook and others had mentioned them to us with outspoken resentment, but nobody had been able to tell us much about them until we met Don León, who had been their host for three days. When the Carnegie expedition had come down the river the year before, it had encountered a certain amount of mistrustfulness on the part of the natives, due to the unfortunate impression of explorers left by this pair a few years earlier. Among explorers there is a sort of code, to which most adhere, that requires all dealings with natives to be strictly honorable, that forbids any betrayal of native trust—not on grounds of moral principle alone, but because the sins of one party of explorers are visited on their successors. The code is, essentially, self-protective, a matter of mutual loyalty among professional brethren. The two Frenchmen, it seemed, had disregarded this code. According to report, they had cheated the natives at every point, obtaining largesse from them, in addition to the routine hospitality, by false promises. They had evidently “borrowed” supplies as they needed them, giving their assurance in return that they would send them back or make proper payment at a later date. The natives, who have their own code of honorable dealing, were easily taken in. But the result was that the Carnegie explorers found the territory partially “spoiled,” as the term is, for further exploration.

When the pair appeared at Agua Azul, during one of Don León's stays there, they were in quest of the Lacandón Indians, a remnant tribe of wild Mayas that roams the forest bordering the Usumacinta. They presented a spectacle of utter misery. They had no equipment at all, Don León reports, nothing but the clothes they stood in,

and not much of them. They had no food, no money, no hammocks, no *pabellónes*. Even their shoes were in shreds. It seemed as if every beast in the jungle had taken a bite out of each of them at one time or another, as if every bug had staked its claim on them. They were, in a word, horrible to look upon. Yet nothing could persuade them to escape the horror of their position, to give up their self-appointed mission, to abandon their quest of the Lacandónes and attend to their own salvation. It is Don León's reasoned opinion that they were mad, and indeed it is hard to find any other explanation for their behavior. Don León gave them what medical attention he could and kept them three days. But their madness was invincible, no appeal to reason could move them, and on the fourth morning they set out from camp, marching off into the wild forest that extends back from the Mexican bank. Don León stood on the veranda and saw them go.

Don León got out for us, that evening, an old copy of an illustrated French magazine that carried the sequel of their adventures, an article on the Lacandónes, illustrated with photographs (they had evidently supplied themselves with a camera, at least) showing the little Indians, their bows and arrows in hand, their long hair flowing down their shoulders, standing beside one gaunt white explorer. I skimmed it while we talked that evening. It was the regulation piece, the kind of thing some professional travel-writers turn out without ever venturing farther from home than the end of the trolley-line. I remember that the word "savage" (synonymous with our "wild" in French) recurred constantly—*ce peuple sauvage . . . cette forêt sauvage . . . ces pays sauvages*—with occasional references to *bêtes*

*féroces*. It was a passable article at best, certainly no adequate justification of their ordeal. For only one of them had survived the effects of their exposure to write it.

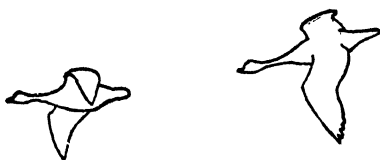


Our own good fortune held at Agua Azul. Immediately upon arriving in the evening, we learned that Don León had a caravan departing in the morning for Tenosique. The first stage of the passage, to El Desempeño, would take two days by boat, with an overnight stop at Yaxchilán. A mule-train would be waiting to meet the boat at Desempeño, and the second stage, to Tenosique, should be accomplished in another two days in view of the extraordinarily favorable conditions for that time of year that prevailed. A moment after our spontaneous expressions of delight at Don León's tidings, Tom and I sobered up and realized that we could not join the caravan. No matter how expeditious the arrangements might be, we must spend at least half a day at the ruins of Yaxchilán, even though we paid for it with a week of useless waiting. Archaeology was what we had come for, and Yaxchilán was the most important archaeological site on the river. Don León saw our dismay and, after a moment's thought, found a solution. He had, for his own use, a little dugout equipped with an outboard motor. For him and his wife it would be a holiday excursion to run us down to Yaxchilán early in the morning, a

matter of only a few hours. Then we would have all the rest of the day for archaeology and would be ready to go on with the caravan the morning after.

You would have thought we were in danger of imminent attack. Don León stood stalwartly in the bow of the boat, in a pose not unlike that of General Washington crossing the Delaware, looking out upon the landscape of sky, forest, and river that sparkled in the early-morning sunlight, as though it had been his personal responsibility to keep it in order. In his hand he held a little pistol and was continuously stroking the trigger-guard with his finger. This pistol, he told us (who had just sold him the last of our firearms), was for use against "alligators." He was not the man to be caught unprepared. His eyes swept the shore up and down for signs of the enemy, and his pistol was held ready, close to the hip. Mrs. Halbeisen, Tom, and I, equally unwilling to be taken by surprise, kept our eyes fixed on that trigger-finger. The fifth and last member of the party, obviously a more prosaic character than any of us, had his own concerns. The little outboard motor, which was his charge, had all the worst characteristics of a mule in grossly exaggerated form. It had balked at the outset of our excursion, unwilling, evidently, to leave the familiar security of home. José, or Tranquilino, or whatever his name was, by dint of sheer persistence in whipping its flywheel and twisting its valves, had finally forced it into a desperate brief spurt that set us all adrift in the middle of the river before it balked again. Now we had already floated down about the first bend and Agua Azul was no longer in sight; Don León was standing guard above us with his little pistol, occasionally shouting orders to José (or Tranquilino), who

belabored the motor with a sort of cold and determined fury; the rest of us were engaged in being casual. Occasionally the motor would take a sudden notion, pop away for a few seconds, churn up a coffee-colored foam behind us, and then subside with a succession of dying coughs. But its stubbornness was no match for José's (or Tranquilino's), and at last it began to perform with fair regularity, balking only occasionally and briefly, as if to test its keeper's mastery. It was already noon, however, when we arrived at Yaxchilán. We had sighted only one crocodilian on our way, but by that time Don León had become discouraged and put his pistol away in his pocket. Before he could draw and cock, the beast had already submerged.







## CHAPTER XI

THE ANCIENT CITY OF YAX-chilán (also known as Menché and Lorillard City) first came to the attention of the world at large through the publication, in 1885, of Chamay's "Les Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde." Over forty years earlier, John L. Stephens, an American gentleman traveling on a special diplomatic mission to Central America for President Van Buren, had inaugurated the whole career of American archaeology by his extra-diplomatic activities in the region. His "Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan," published in 1841, first apprised the general public in America of the fact that the New World, as well as the Old, had its Egypt. Public curiosity, aroused by the tale of great stone cities in the wilderness and the luxuriant growth of legends concerning them, was frustrated for many years by the savage character of the country in which most of these stone cities were isolated. By the 1880's, however, two serious archaeologists were already in the field. Alfred P. Maudslay, an Englishman whose name remains the most distinguished in the annals of American archaeology, was

a notably sober and gifted gentleman-archaeologist with a cultivated spirit. Désiré Charnay, whose sense of humor, rich imagination, and Gallic eye for female beauty among the natives form a contrast to the impeccable British sobriety of Maudslay, was a professional anthropologist whose mission in Central America had the joint financial backing of the French Government and an American millionaire named Lorillard.

In March of 1882 Charnay was in Tenosique, where he heard reports of the ruined city on the left bank of the upper Usumacinta from a certain Suarez, then governor of Tenosique, who claimed to have discovered it himself twelve years earlier. On March 15 he struck north from Tenosique on an expedition through the forest east of the Usumacinta to Paso de Yaxchilán, on its banks, whence he intended to paddle several leagues down river to the site of the ruins. What he did not then know was that, the day before, a British archaeologist called Maudslay had departed by dugout from Paso Real (where the trail from Cobán to Flores crosses the Pasi6n) to visit those same ruins, having heard of them from a professor in Guatemala who had seen them the year before and was, according to Maudslay's best information, "the first European to write any description of them."

Six days after he had left Tenosique, during which time he suffered more than the usual tribulations of travelers in the jungle of Petén, Charnay arrived at Paso Yaxchilán, only to learn that the men who had been sent in advance to construct dugouts and have them ready at his arrival had hardly started on their work. Calculating that the boats could not be ready for use in less than eight days, he found

that his provisions were inadequate for so long a delay. While he was standing on the shore of the river, casting about in his mind for some stratagem to avert failure, a large canoe suddenly appeared from upstream with three men who, Charnay noted with amazement, were not savages. He hailed the boat and learned from the men that they had been on an unsuccessful excursion to get supplies from the Lacandónes and that they were now on their way back to the ruins to join a certain Don Alfredo. Charnay reports the following colloquy between himself and the men:

“ ‘What is this Don Alfredo?’ I asked one of the men.

“ ‘But . . .’ he responded, ‘it is Don Alfredo.’

“ ‘Good enough. But what is he doing down there, in the ruins?’

“ ‘He walks about.’

“ ‘How many are you?’

“ ‘We are sixteen, and we have no more supplies.’

“ ‘Have you another canoe?’

“ ‘Yes, we have a big one.’

“ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘me, I have supplies.’ ”

Thereupon M. Charnay brought forth supplies for the men and handed them his personal card to give Don Alfredo, requesting, at the same time, that Don Alfredo send him a large canoe.

That night Charnay had an attack of fever, and the next day he had to be carried into the canoe that Don Alfredo, in compliance with his request, had sent. Three hours later, accompanied by his secretary, he arrived at the site of the ruins and immediately went in search of Don Alfredo. The encounter is best described in his own words: “Coming to

meet me, I see a large blond young man whom I recognize at first glance as an Englishman and a gentleman. We shake hands; my card has given him my name, which he knew; he tells me his: 'Alfred Maudslay, of London,' and, as I remained somewhat stupefied and discomfited, Alfred Maudslay, divining my thought, promptly said to me:

" 'Do not be offended at my presence; an accident may have made me arrive in these ruins before you, as an accident might have made you arrive before me; I am not a rival at all and you have nothing to fear. I am merely a simple amateur traveling for his pleasure; you are a savant and the site belongs to you: baptize it; explore, photograph, make casts, you are at home here. I have no intention of writing or publishing anything; if need be, don't mention me and keep your discovery for yourself alone; and now let me guide you; I have had a palace prepared, and your residence awaits you.'

"I was profoundly touched by such delicacy; but I could not accept the offer of my generous traveling companion, and we are going to share as friends the glory of having explored this new site."

The graciousness of that last paragraph, the magnanimity of M. Charnay's willingness to share the discovery, can be understood only when one remembers that to him, the eminent representative of the French government, Alfred Maudslay was merely a young gentleman on holiday from England. If he had met Tom and me at the ruins he would, quite properly, have adopted the same tone, and I think we, too, would have hastened to reassure him that we did not consider ourselves in his class. M. Charnay, lacking the gift of prophecy, could not see in Alfred Maudslay the pre-

mier archaeologist of the Western Hemisphere, the future author of the four famous volumes of the "Biologia Centrali-Americana."

I think it probable that Charnay, profoundly touched by Maudslay's "delicacy" and naturally anxious that his readers should understand their relative positions, was guilty of some exaggeration in the loquacity that he attributes to him; for Maudslay was as sober and reticent as he was modest. He wore no plumes in his hat and indulged in no Gallic flourishes. In his own account of the meeting he confesses to surprise at having his men, on their return from a foraging expedition up river, hand him something carefully wrapped up in paper that "proved to be a card from M. Désiré Charnay, the head of a Franco-American scientific exploring expedition." "The next day," he continues, "I sent my canoes back for him, and leaving his men camped at Yalchilan, he arrived with his secretary at the ruins and occupied a house which had been cleared for him, and he very kindly added his ample supply of provisions to my somewhat meagre stock." There follows, in the account, a sentence acknowledging the "interest" of M. Charnay's book and the value of his contributions to the Trocadéro Museum in Paris; therewith the incident is closed. Maudslay was evidently not profoundly touched; he took for granted the behavior of gentlemen in the wilderness. The important thing was to get on with the work.

Herr Teobert Maler, the tireless Austrian, who first visited Yaxchilán for two days in 1895 and later reported on it at length, differs from both of his predecessors in his tone, which verges perpetually on the querulous. He implies that he might himself have had "the glory of having

explored this new site" for the first time, as he had first heard mention of it when he was in Chiapas as early as 1877—"but at that time I was not prepared for so difficult an expedition." Meanwhile (one has to read between the lines in Maler), "amply provided with funds by the French Government and the American millionaire Lorillard," Charnay undertook the expedition, though he "limited himself" in his work because Maudslay had anticipated him. Maler, like Maudslay, adopts the formula-adjective "interesting" in referring to the French savant's "*Les Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*." Both men, having their own scientific reputations to consider, had to be careful not to say anything that might be taken as an endorsement of the theories produced by Charnay's fertile imagination and outlined in his book.

But with Alfred P. Maudslay, Esquire, Herr Maler hardly succeeds in disguising his indignation. "To my great disappointment," he writes, "I found that he had removed many of the carved lintels, taking them with him to England." He is also impatient with "certain scholars" (read Maudslay) who applied to the site "the imposing name 'Menché-tinamit!'" and devotes two paragraphs to denouncing it and explaining "why I could not make up my mind to use this otherwise admirable name." Charnay, who, one recalls, had been explicitly urged by Maudslay to "baptize" the site, had named it Lorillard City, an act of outrageous courtesy that may be most readily appreciated by imagining that Schliemann, upon his discovery of ancient Troy, had dubbed it Schnitzelburg.

Maudslay and Charnay remained at the ruins only about three days after their meeting and then departed together—

arm in arm, as I picture it. Maler, after his preliminary visit of two days in 1895, returned to spend two months there in 1897 and three months in 1900. He was the most stubbornly thorough, being Teutonic, of the three explorers, and it is natural that he should have ended by making the most complete report, which occupies almost a hundred folio pages of the Peabody Museum Memoirs, Volume II. With Maudslay's account in the "*Biologia Centrali-Americana*," published in 1902, it remains the last word on the ruins of Yaxchilán, no explorations of consequence having taken place at the site since that day.

There is good reason why Yaxchilán has been neglected by explorers since the turn of the century. In the heyday of Maudslay, Charnay, and Maler, Mayan archaeology was still in its infancy and the efforts of explorers were directed chiefly toward discovering fine examples of sculpture and architecture in order to make them known to the outside world. What was written of the remains of the Mayan civilization was chiefly descriptive, though the descriptions were often supplemented, in the works of the more daring and imaginative writers, by speculations of a more or less fantastic nature concerning its origins. Atlantis, Mu, and the Lost Tribes of Israel were frequently mentioned. Charnay pretended to see a Japanese influence in the architecture of Palenque. Maler, whose work rarely involved his imagination, confined himself to detailed description of the physical material. Between these two men you have the whole range of respectable archaeological activity in the field up to the first decade of the current century.

But a new generation of archaeologists was growing up

now, the study of Central American antiquities was entering a new phase. Already in 1882, the year Maudslay and Charnay explored Yaxchilán, Brinton published his translation of "The Books of Chilán Balam," copies of lost Mayan chronicles dealing with the history of Yucatán before the Spanish Conquest, and thus a foundation of sorts was provided for reconstructing the history of the Maya. At the same time, the study of Mayan inscriptions, by which it was hoped that new historical material would be made available, was getting under way. Finally, in 1910, came the publication of Bowditch's "The Numeration, Calendar Systems, and Astronomical Knowledge of the Mayas," of which Dr. Morley, the most indefatigable of present-day decipherers, says that it "marked the dawn of a new era in the study of the Maya hieroglyphic writing." In that new era the chief labor of archaeologists in Guatemala and Honduras was directed toward reconstructing the Mayan past on the basis of the inscribed monuments that were to be found in most of the principal Old Empire sites. There was a sporadic habit, among the Old Empire Mayas, of erecting dated stone stelae at regular intervals of five, ten, or twenty years. The dates on these stelae, deciphered, have given students a clue to the periods and the order in which the various cities were occupied. In their enthusiasm for reconstructing Mayan history by consulting these dates, however, they have often gone so far as to assume that the period of occupation of each particular site was identical with the extreme range of dates at that site, as if the settlers had erected their first dated monument on the morning of their arrival upon the scene, their last on the afternoon of their departure. Fashions in scholarship, as in millinery, eventually go to extremes and provoke reactions.



The reaction against the importance that, for the past thirty or forty years, has been attached to the inscriptions is already in evidence. Central American archaeology is now entering the third phase of its development, in which geography will probably be the predominant factor.

Since the day of Maudslay, however, it has not been the grandest and most spectacular sites that have invited the labors of archaeologists, but those that provide significant dates for reconstructing Mayan history. The remains of Yaxchilán, which are among the most extensive and sophisticated of the Mayan area, have taken a secondary place because of their scarcity of dated inscriptions, while such a site as Uaxactún, which the 19th century explorers would have found inferior in importance, has been the center of attention in recent years because it contains the earliest established date of any of the large Mayan sites. The reports of Maudslay and Maler on Yaxchilán, issued about the turn of the century, thus remain the last word on the city to this day.



We were a bit late, Tom and I. Fifteen hundred years ago, the buildings of the metropolis of Yaxchilán were still covered with ornamental sculpture in stone and stucco, painted in gaudy colors; the plazas, the stone pyramids, staircases, temples, and palaces, rising above each other on a series of natural terraces refashioned by human artifice, were still open to sunlight and the river, free of the overbearing jungle, which had been forced back beyond the city-limits, and one can imagine that when the citizens crowded the spaces between the buildings on some sunny midday, many of them almost naked, some dressed in ornamented tunics, a few burdened with the elaborate feather headdresses and plaques and masks that are represented in what remains of the sculpture, the scene from the river must have epitomized all the splendor of human life. But we had come too late. Now the continuous wall of dark forest that stood against the waterway betrayed no sign of human occupation, past or present, except for the fragile hut and cook-house of Don Ulysis de la Cruz, which occupied a partially cleared area of perhaps half an acre on the bank. Don Ulysis was the official custodian of the past, the caretaker appointed by the federal government of Mexico to guard the ruins against the vandalism of wood-cutters, and against the inroads of an imperishable vegetation that forces its roots and tendrils into every crack, and will, in time, split asunder the most solid of stones. Among his specific duties was that of keeping the city "bushed"—that is, of holding the jungle back from the monuments. But the task was too great for one man, and all he had succeeded in doing was to keep a few narrow trails open between the ruins.

Having deposited us on the bank, the Halbeisens left immediately for the return journey, nervous at the necessity of nursing a balky engine back to Agua Azul, against the current, before nightfall. The last we saw of them, they were adrift in the middle of the river, floating downstream, while their voga alternately spun the flywheel and adjusted the valves.

Our impression of Don Ulysis de la Cruz, whom we got to know well in the succeeding days, was of a natural aristocrat, a prince among men. Stronger, more stalwartly built than most natives, his large handsome face with its square features, especially the broad mouth and black eyes, had an open expression and something of the innocence of a wide-awake child. He was unmistakably a good and energetic citizen, a *buen hombre*—and also, I may add, a man of family. Maler, whom I suspect of not having found many men to his liking and still fewer to call friend, refers to a certain Lamberto de la Cruz, who guided him through the rapids of Anaité in 1899, as “my old friend”—and the consensus on the river today is that the best boatmen for navigating those dangerous rapids are Gaspar de la Cruz and his brothers, the sons of Don Ulysis. To be a De la Cruz on the Usumacinta is to belong to the royal family of the land.

In Don Ulysis we first came into contact, however remotely, with official Mexico; at Yaxchilán we met the faint outermost ripples of that great upheaval that bears the title of national revolution. It was merely that Don Ulysis, like others in the pay of the Mexican government, was no longer receiving his wages, or receiving them with increasing irregularity. Consequently, as a free man, he no longer felt any honorable obligation to keep the ruins bushed, and

he made this his excuse. The revolution itself meant nothing to him, he had no real knowledge or understanding of it, but he did know that his wages were no longer filtering through the bureaucracy that maintained its farthest outpost at Tenosique, whither he traveled to collect them. He did not reason the matter out, but automatically came to accept a perfunctory view of his duties.

There was, evidently, no great problem in the support of such a small establishment as Don Ulysis maintained. Enough money came through, I gathered, for the little cornmeal, beans, and coffee necessary to the subsistence of himself and his wife, or it may be that his sons, in their journeyings up and down river, helped him out.

The wife of Don Ulysis—whose name may have been Doña Penelope, for all I know—was a strikingly tall, large-boned, disorderly woman with a voice that, even in its conversational tones, must have disturbed the sleep of the dead. She was always in transports of good humor, and her sudden rending bursts of laughter sent the birds up from the opposite bank. She talked incessantly, too, as if she enjoyed life too much to keep quiet about it. I think she was almost as good a man as Don Ulysis himself, awkward and ugly and large-boned as she was, hopping about before the cooking-fire like some overgrown ostrich in a stained pink dress that hung on its frame like a tattered curtain. Don Ulysis was used to her and evidently loved her, for he invariably responded pleasantly to her shouts and laughter, though in a more subdued manner.

The social center of Yaxchilán, now in the 20th century, was the De la Cruz cook-house, hardly a house at all, since it consisted only of a thatched roof supported on poles. It

had a lovely view, being right at the brink of the bank, surrounded closely on three sides by jungle and open, on the fourth, to the broad vista of the flowing river and the rolling banks of forest beyond. The cook-house was without ornaments, except for two fledgling macaws whose pinfeathers had already pushed through the natal down and were now bursting open at the ends in all the rainbow-colors of the final plumage. Like all juvenile parrots, they appeared so weak that it seemed nothing could save them; they staggered awkwardly on the dirt floor, falling over sideways at each attempted step, and their heads, out of all proportion to the bodies that were supposed to support them, seemed much too heavy to be held erect. It was hard to believe that in a few weeks they would be such upright and regal birds as those across the river, shouting in the strident voice of Doña Penelope where now they merely gurgled. The principal articles of furniture under the roof of the cook-house were a long board table and benches along its length at either side. Here we ate our meals, and here we sat, when it rained in the afternoon, enjoying the conversation of the curator of Yaxchilán.



Don Ulysis led the way uphill through the woods. We came upon stone temples, elevated high on steep pyramids covered with grass and low vegetation, massive temples of a more elaborate though less imposing aspect than those of Tikal. Their façades, instead of being pierced by only

one narrow entranceway, as at the latter site, had multiple entrance ways, as many as their width allowed; the stone vaults spanned wider chambers, so that it had been necessary, in many cases, to strengthen them with buttresses rising against the walls; the walls themselves were not nearly so heavy as at Tikal. These temples represented a later stage of Mayan architectural development, a refinement of construction that was, like all refinements, a weakening. For all the elegance they gained by comparison with the temples of Tikal, for all their excellent state of preservation, too, they had not endured the passage of the centuries as well. Their builders, even at this early stage, had begun to sacrifice something of the more primitive structural solidity; the Doric had already given way to the Ionic, the Early Gothic to the Flamboyant.

Yaxchilán is noted chiefly for its architectural sculpture. The stucco figures that, presumably, once decorated the roof-combs and upper façades of the principal buildings are gone now. What remains is chiefly the delicate and elaborate stone-sculpture of the door-lintels. In most of the Old Empire sites the door-lintels were of wood, which, succumbing to rapid decay in these humid and verminous regions, generally made them the greatest structural weaknesses in the architecture. When they gave way, a good part of the upper façades which they supported fell with them, so that, in such sites as Nakum, the temples, otherwise well-preserved, have fallen wide-open to the elements in front. Only at Tikal, where the solidity of the masonry is unique, are the carved lintels of sapodilla wood preserved in place, and with them the façades of the buildings. But at Yaxchilán the custom was to use stone for the lintels, a

custom for which archaeology has reason to be grateful. Some of the most beautiful and sophisticated carving of the Mayan area adorns the undersides of the lintels of Yaxchilán.

One of the principal temples at Yaxchilán was gracefully named by Maler "The Temple of Ketsalkoatl, whose head has been struck off." This is typical Maleresque. Another temple, for example, he called: "The Temple of the Calcinced Sculptured Lintels 44, 45, 46, and with the Sacrificial Stone on the edge of the platform before the central doorway." Maudslay, who had chosen "The Temple of Ketsalkoatl, whose head has been struck off" as his dwelling-place while at Yaxchilán, had been content to call it "Temple A." Charnay called it merely "*Premier Temple*." It occupies a lofty position on a special terrace of the main "acropolis," and you have to climb to reach it. From the foot of the platform that supports it what you see is a broad stone building, divided into three horizontal zones, completely framed by vegetation as though it were a natural outcropping of rock from beneath the hill itself. The lowest zone is plain, marked by three simple doorways evenly spaced across its width. The second, divided from the lowest by a sharp cornice, slopes inward and bears all sorts of stone niches and protuberances that once formed the framework for stucco ornamentation. This second zone corresponds to the vault inside. The topmost zone is merely the roof-comb, a sort of trellised screen of stone-work that also supported and was hidden by stucco in its original form.

Maudslay says nothing of the wild-life that shared his ancient quarters, for he was not given to irrelevancies, but he must have had to cope with it nevertheless. Enter any

of these structures, and as your footsteps resound on the stone of the entranceway they evoke a rumbling reply from the dark interior, like a battery of muffled kettle-drums heard against a rising wind-storm, and instantly a tempest of dark wings brushes by you, escaping from the interior. The air, outside as well as in, is now full of bats. The doorways spew them forth in streams. Inside, in darkness, they swoop up and down, from end to end of the long chamber, stopping and turning abruptly, avoiding all collisions. This inferno is their bat-heaven. A few, possibly the elders of the colony, remain hanging like wilted leaves from the vaults, sometimes in clusters. They are of two kinds, these bats: the one small, delicate, agile, and mothlike, so similar to our little brown bat in the eastern states that I would not know how to distinguish them on the wing; the other is two or three times as large, more ponderous in flight, with a hollower and more emphatic wing-beat, and with a look of considerable menace. I don't know what this second bat is, except that it is reputed to be harmless. The other, however, the one that seems no more dangerous than a butterfly, is none other than the sinister vampire. Vampires suck human blood when they can get it, but the *pabellónes* under which men ordinarily sleep forestall them. Their actual damage is to mules and cattle, which, from undergoing regular nocturnal bleedings, develop pernicious anemia and die by degrees.

If smells could be bottled and preserved as such, one could gather some rare samples from these bat-infested ruins. The basic ingredient is stony antiquity, the peculiarly chilling odor of which, rare in North America, is familiar to those who have frequented the ancient cathedral-crypts



of Europe. But here, under this stone vault in semi-darkness, is an accumulation of this scent that antedates even the oldest of Old World cathedrals. Added to it is the pungent odor of a poisonous moisture that coats the walls and that I take to be, at least in part, the fetid and exhausted breath of bats. You may even feel misty microscopic beads of sweat in the air, as though they fell from the wings of the creatures flapping through the vaults overhead.

You won't see much else inside here. Bits of stucco still adhere to the walls, and there are the long streaks and stains of dampness, visible in the light from the doorways. Piles of rubble, fallen stones, litter the floor, and you may come on a cast-off snake's skin, dry and colorless. Though this was evidently one of the principal temples, its plan is simple. Essentially there is one long chamber running throughout its width, with the three doorways, all on one side, leading into it. The ceiling overhead is a typical Mayan vault, formed by overlapping each successive course of masonry till finally the two walls meet in the middle, forming an inverted V in cross-section. This vault, however, is wider than most and, to enable it to bear the weight of the roof-comb above it, it had been necessary to raise four heavy stone piers or buttresses, rising to its apex, against the inside of the back wall. In addition, two transverse walls make a little closet at either end of the main chamber.

The interior of the building never had any sculpture attached to it, for it was mostly in darkness, and the stucco sculpture that once adorned the outside is now wholly gone. But, from its protected position, the sculpture on the underside of the three lintels is in an almost perfect state of

preservation. The relief is low, but very sharp, with the crispness of steel-engraving. In all three cases the stones represent two stocky human figures, one large and one small, in ceremonial attitudes and ceremonial regalia. They wear enormous headdresses with plumes flowing and stylized serpents writhing from them, heavy ornamented collars and arm-bands and leg-bands and waist-bands with plaques and masks attached, and in their hands they carry staffs or scepters or batons of one sort or another, also ornamented with plumes and serpents. Only the faces and thighs are naked, the former, in each case, showing in profile the long nose, full lips, and receding forehead of Indian aristocracy. The exposed portions of the stones are roughly square, and the elaborate regalia fills most of the space not occupied by the figures themselves. The remainder is taken up by bands of hieroglyphics. I suppose these stones were designed chiefly to inspire awe, because even across all these centuries, across all the barriers to understanding that separate us from them, they have that effect. There is an impulse to uncover one's head in the presence of such genuine religious solemnity as they depict. This is High Mass in any language and in any time, whatever gods it may represent. Nature and the supernatural have touched for one sacramental moment, and that moment has been perpetuated in stone. All this elaboration of costume, all this wealth of artistry, the subtlety of the modeling and the devoted rendering of every detail, were designed to lift men above their common selves to the level of their common aspirations. There is more here than can be measured by any arithmetic—more than what is included in any archaeological report.

When, in the mid-19th century, the ruined cities of Central America began to attract the interested attention of the civilized world, it was natural that, in ignorance of the date of the ruins, a legend and a hope should have manifested themselves that all these cities were not dead, that in some of them, lost in an unknown wilderness, the original race of inhabitants still carried on their traditional way of life in their historic environment. Why not? In 1524, when Don Pedro de Alvarado came upon the great Indian capital of Utlán, in the highlands of Guatemala, he found it still at the height of its glory. Perhaps, even as late as the 19th century, there were other Utláns in the vast regions between Guatemala and Mexico that remained unconquered and unknown. The belief in this possibility was greatly reinforced by the words of a Spanish *padre* in Santa Cruz Quiché (the site of Utlán), which John L. Stephens, the American diplomatic emissary, reported to the world in the eighteen-forties. "The thing that roused us," wrote Stephens, "was the assertion by the *padre* that, four days on the road to Mexico, on the other side of the great sierra [i.e., the Alta Vera Paz, of which the capital is Cobán], was a living city, large and populous, occupied by Indians, precisely in the same state as before the discovery of America. He had heard of it many years before at the village of Chajul, and was told by the villagers that from the top-most ridge of the sierra this city was distinctly visible. He was then young, and with much labor climbed to the naked summit of the sierra, from which, at a height of ten or twelve thousand feet, he looked over an immense plain extending to Yucatan and the Gulf of Mexico [i.e., Petén] and saw at a great distance a large city spread over a great

space, and with turrets white and glittering in the sun. The traditional account of the Indians of Chajul is, that no white man has ever reached this city; that the inhabitants speak the Maya language, are aware that a race of strangers has conquered the whole country around, and murder any white man who attempts to enter their territory. They have no coin or other circulating medium; no horses, cattle, mules, or other domestic animals except fowls, and the cocks they keep under ground to prevent their crowing being heard."

Stephens, who was not a man to be stampeded by his own or anybody else's imagination, acknowledged that, "being now in my sober senses, I do verily believe there is much ground to suppose that what the padre told us is authentic." He even outlined schemes by which the city might be gained. "Five hundred men could probably march directly to the city, and the invasion would be more justifiable than any ever made by the Spaniards . . ." Alternatively, "two young men of good constitution, and who could afford to spare five years, might succeed." But "no man, even if willing to peril his life, could undertake the enterprise with any hope of success, without hovering for one or two years on the borders of the country, studying the language and character of the adjoining Indians, and making acquaintance with some of the natives."

Vain hope! What the padre saw from the heights of the sierra, looking northward over the boundless plain of Petén, must have been a dim cloud-mass on the horizon, or possibly a mirage that momentarily lifted the towers of Tikal, some hundred and fifty miles distant, into view. There is no living aboriginal city in all the area occupied by the Mayas, nor was there in Stephens's day, a century ago. The

cities of the Old Empire region had already been deserted before Stephens was born.

Had they? Well, perhaps not quite. The hopes of the 19th century, expressed by Stephens, have been justified to this extent, that the city of Yaxchilán, ruined as it is, still serves as a religious center for a remnant band of Mayas, fast dying out now, that roams the forests on either side of the Usumacinta River. The Lacandónes still came, in the year 1938, at regular intervals, to offer their sacrifices to the gods whose temples these are.

When Charnay wrote his account of Yaxchilán, he thought that the Lacandónes had already deserted it. "As to their religion," he wrote of them, "I could learn nothing, except that before the discovery of the ruins they came there in crowds to practise ceremonies, but that, since the appearance of the whites in their ancient temples, they had abandoned them for ever."

Maudslay's information was somewhat better. When he first entered the temple he chose for his abode, he reports, "there must have been over a hundred pieces of rough pottery . . . strewn on the floor. . . . Many of these pots contained half burnt copal, and from the positions in which we found them it is evident that they must have been placed in the house within recent years, probably by the Lacandons, who still, I am told, hold the place in reverence."

Charnay and Maudslay were both too conservative. Maler, reporting in 1901, almost twenty years after their visit to the ruins, writes as follows: "Indians come even now from the remotest wilderness to lay down before this image of the god . . . little sacrificial gifts, and to burn incense in tastefully ornamented vessels adorned with feath-

ers, and to perform strange dances to the sound of the *tunkul*, during which they drink copiously of *x-balché*. . . . It is much to be regretted that no traveller has as yet succeeded in witnessing these remarkable rites. But the Indians come—no one knows whence. They suddenly appear, have their celebration, and vanish in the forests without leaving a trace that could be followed up.”

Here at Yaxchilán, then, is the dying ember of a tradition that has, presumably, come down unbroken through the long generations from the first age of the Mayas. These Indians who worship at the ruins are a degenerate remnant, probably not more than one hundred strong; they are the last of the Lacandónes, and it is estimated that this century will see their extinction.



We had managed to disturb the bats in some half-dozen buildings before the clouds gathered and the downpour began. For a time we braved it, examining the most important groups of ruins, and then returned quickly to shelter under the cook-house roof, where the feeble macaw-children regarded the weather sideways out of jaundiced eyes and Doña Penelope busied herself about the fire.

Our first information on Don Ulysis, before leaving the States, had given us to understand that he was something of a character, a man who would be obliging or not, de-

pending on how we impressed him. Forewarned, we had carried with us a letter of introduction from Linton Satterthwaite, whose years of field-work at Piedras Negras, a few leagues down river, had brought him into contact with Don Ulysis and won his friendship. It was to be our fortunate experience on the river that a letter from "Mister Sat" (as he was known) was better than all the passports of all the governments of mankind. With Don Ulysis, in whom we had expected to find a formidable character, it was a case of *mi casa es su casa* from the beginning.

Now he went to his hut and returned, shortly, with a sheaf of typewritten papers that contained all the personal letters he had received from Mister Sat over the years of their acquaintance, and, seating himself across the table from us, proceeded to read them out loud, beginning with the first and continuing through to the one we had just added to the collection. They were, for the most part, merely polite notes intended to maintain Don Ulysis's good-will, for it is part of an archaeologist's business to remain on the best possible terms with the natives of the regions in which he works. Like some absorbed bibliophile reading from an ancient holograph to a couple of fellow connoisseurs who might be expected to envy him such treasure, Don Ulysis read the letters to us—haltingly, for each word had to be spelled out separately. When he was done, he turned to us for an opinion of their worth, and we agreed wholeheartedly that they were beyond price.

Later, our conversation turned to the rapids of Anaité, which we would have to shoot the next day. Don Ulysis nursed a quiet grief over one of his own sons who had been killed in the rapids some three weeks before our arrival.

But his grief appeared moderate, the grief of acceptance, for he had that fatalism characteristic of all men who live beyond the security of civilization. Death is so common, so close always, that it is already partly discounted in advance.







## CHAPTER XII

**T**HE BOAT FROM AGUA AZUL, under the command of Don Lucas White, arrived about dusk. Don Lucas was a black Negro, so old and slender that he appeared to have wasted away prematurely in anticipation of the grave. His fragility was emphasized by an immense straw sombrero with an overshadowing brim like a platter. But his apparent agedness gave no impression of being venerable. On the contrary, there was an unmistakable air of slyness and rascality about him. He was a black urchin grown old, his gray hairs without honor; by the looks of him one would judge that he had never, in his long lifetime, been up to any good. Of course he spoke English. Wherever, in the interior of Central America, you find a full-blooded Negro you may address him in English with perfect assurance that he will answer in the same tongue.

Don Lucas had been born (an urchin, I am sure) in Bâton Rouge, Louisiana. When we met him he had long since lost count of his age, but he supposed he must have been about sixteen or twenty when he had found it neces-

sary to escape from New Orleans, very suddenly, because of a gambling incident that had resulted in a brawl. The facts were obscure in his account—indeed, he never spoke except in the vaguest terms. He had shipped across the Gulf of Mexico, all those long years ago, and found work as a mahogany-cutter on the Usumacinta. To Don León, nowadays, he was a thorn in the flesh, for he made money on the side by distilling *aguardiente* which he sold to Don León's workmen. Don León was powerless to restrain him as he conducted his private business from the Guatemalan shore, where the arm of Mexican law, which might have been induced for special considerations to reach out from Tenosique to Agua Azul in the form of a police-expedition, was powerless to act. So Don León had to put up with Lucas White's mischief, and so great was the old reprobate's prowess in navigating the rapids of Anaité that he even employed him as a boatman, despite his rascality.

The boat was a pitpan, considerably larger than the average dugout, but like it in shape. The crew of four men either sat or stood in the hull, as they pleased, and manipulated two pairs of oars, not in the long strokes used for sculling, but in jerks accomplished by sharp turns of the wrists. Don Lucas stood in the stern, steering the boat by means of a long sweep extending behind it, while the passengers, some half-dozen men and one woman, lounged in the hull and enjoyed their ease.



Tom and I, having so far kept our relationship on a high plane of good humor, were already, about this time, beginning to snipe at each other in the restrained manner of a pair of good friends who have been too long in each other's sight. It would be fairer to say that I had begun sniping at Tom, though there was some slight and increasing return from his side. Each was thoroughly familiar with the other's foibles, by now, and took a certain satisfaction in showing them up. Tom's chief foible, in my estimation, was what I considered a ridiculous desire to plan our itinerary rigidly in advance. If the natives reported the distance from here to there as five leagues, Tom, taking the report in good faith, would translate five leagues into, say, seven and a half hours' march, on the basis of which he would set a fixed time of departure and a fixed time of arrival exactly seven and a half hours later. I, as the veteran tropical explorer, would urge that when a native said five leagues he meant anything from two to twelve, that life was never certain, that to make immutable plans was to tempt fate, that the best plan, in short, was the sketchiest. Now, for the first time, at Yaxchilán, I began to be unreasonably irritated by this habit of Tom's of always talking sanguinely in terms of definite mathematical distances and lapses of time where there was no possibility of advance knowledge. I insisted that there were only three recognized categories of distance in these regions: (1) a short distance, expressed by "*una legua*" or "*allí, no más*"; (2) a fair distance, expressed by a plural number of leagues within reason; (3) a great distance, expressed by a long-drawn falsetto "Oooooooooh!" a wave of the hand, and the final exclamation, "*muy lejos, Señor!*"—very far, sir! It was ridiculous, said I, to cut the matter any finer than that. For his own

part, Tom was beginning to feel some irritation at my carelessness and the fatalistic turn of mind that I manifested in the field. As a man of action, he was mildly put out by my passive acquiescence in all the uncertainties of life. What it came down to, in the last analysis, was that he liked time-tables and I did not.

Hitherto we had regarded this divergence in taste with complete good humor. Now, however, whenever either of us made a mistake, the other was always quick to score a point.

The first point was scored that evening at Yaxchilán, when Tom, going up to Lucas White, inquired what time it was planned to take our departure in the morning. The old Negro scratched his grizzled head, thought a moment, and then judged we would get started at "six o'clock"—"six o'clock" being in fact a local euphemism for sunrise. Tom, pleased at such a definite statement, and rapidly calculating in his mind the number of minutes that would be needed for our preparation, suggested first that Don Lucas rouse us at five o'clock, and then, reconsidering, amended the suggested time to "a quarter to five sharp." Don Lucas looked puzzled, having neither a watch nor any but the vaguest knowledge of what "a quarter to five sharp" meant, then assented as though he were merely indulging the inscrutable whim of the white man. When we were alone, later, I ragged Tom for bewildering the old Negro with his own civilized notions of hours and minutes, and was surprised to notice that there was, for the first time, a note of irascibility in my ragging.

Don Ulysis joined us for the trip to Tenosique, having some business to transact there, or wanting merely to give

himself a holiday. The rest of the passenger-list included what, from our observation of life, Tom and I took to be a honeymooning couple. The husband was a bashful Indian boy with deformed teeth and an oddly shaped head that came up to a high crown under a coarse black mat of hair. The girl was mostly Indian, but partly negroid. Though not especially fat to outward appearance, her body had the squat shape and the solidity of a beer-barrel, as if the skeleton itself were simply a cylindrical cask. Both manifested the highest good-humor, yet were shy with the other passengers. They smiled continuously. It seemed that they were unused to travel, and the girl, especially, was nervous. She had a collection of glassy-eyed chickens to look after, as well as various household goods made up into cloth bundles; but the bundles were continually coming apart, the chickens were threatening to scramble over the gunwales, disaster in one shape or another was ever impending. The boy, who, according to native custom, need not have concerned himself with these matters, displayed a lover's gallantry, gathering up the disrupted bundles, catching the chickens, and calming his agitated consort. The rest of us looked on with sympathy and contributed soft words of comfort and encouragement in each crisis. Don Lucas, Tom, and I were the only other notable characters on board. The remainder were all men, nondescript, passengers and crew indistinguishable. There was also, to complete the count, a sad yellow dog, belonging to no one in particular, that crouched in the prow and did its best to avoid notice.

The river, constrained into a gorge by encroaching hills, had become narrower and more rapid. It foamed and broke over outlying rocks. But the woods that clothed the steep banks were dead. Few sounds issued from them and almost

no birds appeared. Compared to those along the higher reaches of the river, the trees here were small and sparse, for they grew from shallow soil that showed frequent outcroppings of limestone.

The head of the rapids of Anaité was marked by a large flat shelf of rock extending obliquely into the water from the right bank. Just beyond it, the swollen waterflow shied at some gigantic pebbles in its course, bolted to one side, stampeded helter-skelter downstream, shattered itself against a colony of massive boulders that opposed it, then lost all semblance of orderly progress and went cascading through an irregular mesh of channels, dashing over obstacles or swerving aside from them. We put in at the rock-shelf to discharge the passengers, who would walk along the shore in safety and re-embark below the rapids, and to prepare the boat for her ordeal. Tom and I were staunchly determined to stay with her, against the admonitions of Don Lucas. Don Ulysis also was remaining, to serve at one of the oars. The other passengers set off along the bank, clambering over a confusion of rocks that had slipped down from above, followed by the yellow dog.

The hull was closed in with boards and then swathed tightly in canvas to make it waterproof. The men took their positions at the oars, Don Lucas stood with one hand on the long sweep like a captain on the poop-deck of a man-of-war about to engage in battle. Tom and I seated ourselves on the now decked-over prow, gripped the gunwales with both hands, and prepared our minds to meet our fate.

Almost as quickly as we left the security of our landing, it seemed that Don Lucas and his crew completely and catastrophically lost control of the craft. The main current,

as if from some sudden and malicious caprice, caught us by surprise and spun us about like a top. Showers of spray overwhelmed us. In a moment we were dashing downstream stern-first, Don Lucas crouching with his back to an immense dome of rock that loomed directly ahead, his sweep useless, fright in his eyes. Destruction was at hand and we braced ourselves for it. . . . Then, after all, the boat did not meet the rock; she glanced aside and again there was utter confusion. The landscape was whirling about us till there was no telling which bank was which. The current shot us diagonally across to one bank, turned us about, shot us back through a confusion of boulders that seemed to be surging upstream, to where the passengers and the yellow dog waited on shore. Almost, we brought up to that landing—but the boat was still out of control and in a moment we were far down on the other side of the river, but below the worst of the rapids. The crew was again in control now; slowly, laboriously, they began forcing the boat upstream to the station where the passengers and the yellow dog waited to be taken aboard.

"Is it all over?" Tom and I breathed to each other simultaneously. Mortal danger had showed itself for such a brief moment that there had hardly been time to appreciate it; we were both just a trifle disappointed, though drenched through.



To readers who take it for granted that a traveler's narrative of this sort must contain some report of fearsome encounters with wild beasts, I have to offer a word of ex-

cuse and explanation. It is not a grateful mission to be the agent of disenchantment, and perhaps it would be better not to undertake it at all. But the fact is, there was a tiger, and his place on this record belongs with the other events of this day's journey.

The American tiger, more precisely known as jaguar, is one of the very common denizens of Central America. That does not mean, however, that it is a common event to see one. Only in the pages of those venturesome authors who refrain from drawing too sharp a line between fact and fiction do tigers snarl from every limb. Recall that cats are wary and usually nocturnal creatures, living by stealth and secrecy. Even in the environs of New York City we have wildcats, but only once in several lifetimes are they likely to be glimpsed. It is much the same in Central America, where they are, granted, a good deal more common. Yet these travel-writers would have you believe that the tigers constitute an ever-present and frequently visible menace.

I do not say that jaguars are not seen, and seen frequently under certain circumstances. But, like the other large beasts of the jungle, they are not seen commonly by the casual traveler. With hunters who know their business it is otherwise. Taintor, in his day, using dogs and bait, undoubtedly saw many tigers, most of which he shot. Another hunter whom I knew in the Petén, a native Belize-man, boasted that he could go out alone on a day's hunt and bring back the corpse of almost any large animal that was asked for. He followed no trails and always went barefooted, since he must tread as silently as the beasts he stalked. Though we never put him to the test of a tiger, several of us did once send him out into the jungle for peccary-meat, and he was as good as his word, returning



that same evening with a stout boar. His strange aptitude, he claimed, lay partly in his knowledge of the haunts and habits of the various species, but chiefly in his ability to smell his quarry out. He had a nose like a hound's.

It was mid-afternoon when the shout of "tigre!" went up from the boat.

"Where? Where is he? *Donde 'stá?*" Tom and I asked, seeing nothing but the dead river-banks.

"There, ahead—right there!" Don Lucas said, pointing down-river to where a margin of pebbly beach was exposed on the right bank.

"Where? Where? I don't see him!"

"Too late! He's gone. *Se fué.*"

Most of the passengers had seen the cat. They agreed that it was a small tiger drinking from the edge of the river, and that it had fled back into the woods almost as soon as the boat came into sight. Tom and I had been looking in the wrong direction, and had seen nothing. That was our first and, to date, our last tiger.



The river, having just flowed through a long straight pass between hills, swerved abruptly leftward to avoid the salient mass of a wooded hill, the silhouette of which cut a large scallop from the lower sky. Beyond the corner, it ran straight again and a long reach of waterway, extending almost to the distant horizon, lay revealed in the sparkling daylight of mid-afternoon. The right bank, seen in one enfolding view down the long reach, was the green fringe of a marsh, a barrier of dense palmate reeds that stood like a rampart against the main course of the river. A few

tall trees, strays from the surrounding jungle, rose starkly from the marsh, their footing and their lower trunks hidden from our view by the nearby margin of the reeds. Then, in the background ahead, away off where the river had dwindled to a silver thread, the wooded hills arose once more in dark formation against the sky.

We had long been impatient, Tom and I, having been told for the past hour that El Desempeño, the terminus of the river-route and our destination for the evening, was only "*allí, no más!*" Now, at last, Don Lucas raised his hand and with one finger extended pointed silently to those wooded hills in the distance. It was possible to imagine that a spot of lighter shade in the uniform darkness of that distant forest was a bush-hut. "What is it?" we asked.

"El Desempeño—there it is now!" Don Lucas's tone implied a personal triumph at having discredited our doubt of ever getting there at all. He had been telling us for an hour past that it was only just there, ahead, and behold, he was right!

He was right. Twenty minutes later we were discharging our cargo on the shore. At the head of the bank, in a small trampled clearing beside a bush-hut, the mule-train was already preparing for departure.

El Desempeño is no settlement in its own right, but merely a *bodega*, a storehouse set up at this, the lowest point of navigation, by the Agua Azul Mahogany Company. It is no more than a station-house on the line, held by one family that, when we were there, had taken up residence only the day before. Nominally, the soil on which it stands is Guatemalan, but when we saw the captain of our mule-train we had no doubt that at last we were in Mexico. The man was obviously a Mexican bandit!

"Which shall it be," Tom said, turning to me, "our money or our lives?"

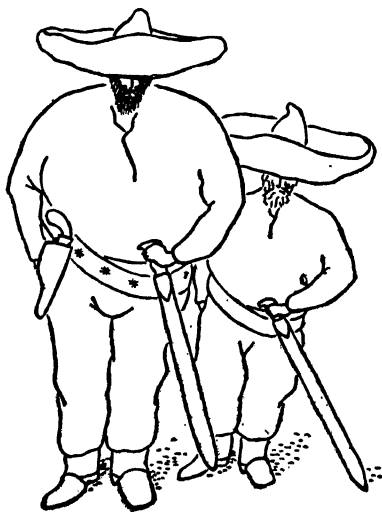
Picture to yourself a tall, slightly stooped, powerfully built man of uncertain age, not old. What you see of his head is only what shows below an immense sombrero with its brim curled up in front, and this part is almost all beard. It is a coal-black contour-beard—not a deliberately cultivated billowing beaver such as a man takes pride in, but merely the product of negligence, the symbol of uncouthness, the badge of barbarism. There is an unusually long and sharp white nose that bisects the upper part of the beard, and then, just visible under the rolling brim of the sombrero and most sinister of all, the eyes. They are black, not only by inheritance, but also with what I take to be a deadly, though partially veiled, ferocity. This man, when you go up and address him, seems to measure you from head to foot with his eyes before he troubles to answer. He looks at you as though judging the quality of your meat and calculating in his mind the best method of attack. Then, having reached a decision, he makes whatever perfunctory response your words call for in a crisp but monotonous voice. He will, you gather, attend to you later!

He has a sycophantic assistant-bandit who in dress and manner apes the master as best he can, but fails miserably. This is a little old man with watery eyes and an essentially frightened expression. He cringes easily, as if not sure when a blow may fall on him. But he wears the same sombrero with the up-curved brim and the same rough beard growing down from his eyes, except that this one is a discolored white. He is nervous in his movements and walks about with a sort of dancing step, as if he expects that at any moment someone will steal up behind and flick him

with a whip unless he quickens his pace beyond what his bowed and aged limbs permit. He wants you to know, too, that in everything he does he is doing his level best, and that he is himself perfectly aware that his best is not nearly good enough. The man, it seems, has learned to survive by invoking a contemptuous mercy from his associates.

Both Mexicans, master and man, wear high-heeled boots with spurs and, on heavy leather belts that cross their waists obliquely, the long straight machetes of Mexico, which reach almost to the ground. Tom and I, by contrast, are carrying typical Guatemalan machetes, little more than half as long, which all the Mexicans that see them will refer to contemptuously as *machetes de juguete*—toy machetes.

The captain provided us now with a couple of mounts, which the little old man breathlessly saddled and bridled. It was two leagues to Piedras Negras, where we hoped to pass the night, and as there were only some two hours of daylight left it was urgent that we waste no time.



There was also another reason why we were eager to start. It had, of course, been our hope from the beginning that we might have the good fortune to see something of the Lacandónes on our trip down the river, though there was little likelihood of it as, fearing all strangers, they have retreated from the river-banks and now live in the depths of the wilderness. But the agent at El Desempeño confirmed what we had first heard at Agua Azul, that one family of Lacandónes, isolated from the main tribes, had established itself on the trail to Piedras Negras, about one kilometer beyond Desempeño. We did not have in mind just what we would do when we found them, but they were, after all, wild Indians with a reputation for savagery, their appearance was barbaric, their weapon was the bow-and-arrow. It would be something merely to see such primitive specimens of our own species.

There is ample of what the author of "Alice in Wonderland" might have termed unauthority to confirm the sinister reputation of the Lacandónes. Like the savages of Darién and those in the upper basin of the Amazon, they have for years served, in a nominal capacity, to spice up the tales of those travel-writers who know that what their public wants is something better than the truth. It would be unfair to say that many of these writers have never been nearer to the wild Indians on whom they report than Broadway and 42nd Street, but it is a fact that their works often give no evidence of it.

One such traveler gives a stirring account of his heroic adventures among the Lacandónes in a book that had an enviable public reception a few years back. The author (who, in this genre, is invariably the hero of his own tale) was, at the time of his encounter with the Indians, in quest

of the "buried treasure and lost books of the Mayas"—whatever they may be. From some carefully unidentified locality in Central America, he sets forth—in what direction, deponent saith not—and, as the days pass, begins to descend to the hot jungle country. Comes the time, two paragraphs farther on, when he has, for several days, been aware that he is already in Lacandón territory. At this point the reader feels a chill along his spinal column and tenses himself for the distant beat of war-drums. Only the hero retains his *sang-froid*, commenting lightly that the Lacandónes are a very nasty outfit. Suddenly, stumbling along through the fetid jungle, he becomes conscious of being watched. There is only one thing to do: keep on going. He keeps on going. All at once he stumbles into a clearing and finds himself confronting a semi-circle of spears that are closing in on him. Keeping a stiff upper lip, he still manages to force a smile. The Lacandón warriors, behind the spears, scowl heavily. The seconds "ooze" away. Within ten seconds of his expected demise, however, when he has all but given himself up for lost, the infection of his frozen smile catches. He is led to a hut and left alone. The reader can again draw breath, for it appears that our hero has been accepted as a guest.

But the status of "guest" involves certain dire obligations. A ceremonial stewed dog must be eaten, for example. The guest must have gifts to offer, and, what is worse, he must accept the gifts that are imposed on him in return. The catastrophe is yet to come.

That same evening the wife of the Lacandón chief arrives at the author's hut, pushing before her a virgin who, we are informed, is "quite nude." Madam is making a

present to the strange white man of the chief's daughter, a present which it would be mortally insulting for him to decline. Here, again, the reader holds his breath. Regardless of the danger, our hero demurs, knowing full well that acceptance of the noble virgin will be the signal for his immediate adoption into the tribe and that he will, thenceforth, have to fight in the tribal wars. Madam, mistaking his hesitation, immediately undertakes a display of the girl's virginity which, the reader is pleased to learn, makes even the author blush. The situation is very tense now. The Indians have gathered round, waiting to see what will happen. Madam, losing all patience, shoves her docile gift at the author. The author catches her, shoves her back. For two minutes he and madam play battledore and shuttlecock with the naked virgin. At the end of that time, madam, having lost the first round and breathing heavily, retires—presumably to prepare the boiling oil. But the author, wasting not a minute, digs his way out under the back of the hut and flees forth into the wilderness.

This sample of *The Lacandón in Fact and Fiction* is only one of several that might be cited. Another that I have at hand is the work of a heroine who was held prisoner in a Lacandón village by two savage ocelots that were chained to the door of her hut. She, too, dug her way out and fled into the trackless wilderness, thereby proving that the Lacandónes may be fooled twice by the same stratagem.

The few anthropologists who have ever studied the Lacandónes offer quite a different picture. Mr. David W. Amram, Jr., who visited them in 1936 and published a report on his visit in the January, 1937, issue of the "Geo-

graphical Review," says nothing of savage ferocity and the custom of offering virgins to distinguished guests. "The Lacandón," he writes, "is cheerful, friendly, and industrious, belying the bad name given him by the outside world." "There are probably not more than 100 of these strange people left, and they are gradually dying out. They live in isolated family groups that are far from one another." He adds that those he visited know they are dying out and "state baldly that when the last of them are gone . . . the world will come to an end. . . . They as Lacandónes, the only beings who know how to propitiate and thereby preserve the ancient beneficial gods, realize that when they are gone the old gods will leave, the evil spirits will rush in, and the land will be destroyed by wind and earthquake!"

In Charnay's day the Lacandónes were commoner on the river than now, having since diminished in numbers and retreated into the thickest of the wilderness, and he reports coming upon an encampment of them on his way to Yaxchilán. "They are not so savage as one pretends," he writes with scholarly candor; "but they have a wild timidity and easily leave their huts to hide in the forest at the appearance of a stranger. They are not ferocious except by way of vengeance. . . . The preceding year, they had assassinated a half-breed of Tenosique who had profited by the absence of one of them to violate his women and pillage his house."

The timidity and almost complete self-sufficiency \* of the Lacandónes is the cause of their survival to this day,

\* They produce everything they need except salt, for which they must trade.



and equally much the cause of their imminent extinction. Presumably the disappearance of the Itzás was simply a matter of their being gradually absorbed by a dominant race, as the Romans were absorbed by the northern Europeans who invaded their territory. In fact, anthropologists point out that few races ever become extinct in the sense that their biological inheritance passes completely from the earth. They become extinct, ordinarily, only to the extent that their racial purity is lost, that their blood is diffused through the veins of outsiders. With the Lacandónes this is not so. Since the first unsuccessful attempt was made to colonize them, in the same year that the Itzás were conquered, they have stalwartly maintained the blood-distinction of their race, which, without foreign reinforcement, must now perish. And when the last of the Lacandónes is dead—which must be soon, as the present remnant contains few women—there will not be even a fraction of Lacandón blood left on the earth. Such violations of Lacandón women as Charnay mentions cannot prevent this, for the resulting offspring would supposedly be brought up with the others and share their fate. The only hope for even fractional survival would be that some devoted lady-anthropologist of youthful age should go down among the Lacandónes and, for so good a cause, enlist the attentions of the Lacandón men. Failing such drastic measures, the Lacandón race must inevitably vanish from the earth in its totality.

For the benefit of any lady-anthropologist who may have this sort of self-sacrifice in mind, it may be worthwhile to cite here Amram's report on the appearance of the Lacandónes. The men, he says, average about 4 feet 10 inches

in height. Their hair, which grows long and loose, is distinguished among American Indians by being wavy, rather than straight, and having a reddish tinge in youth. Their faces and bodies are completely hairless. Some of the men pierce their nostrils for the accommodation of feather or stick ornaments. Both sexes ordinarily wear a single cotton shirt with wide sleeves that hangs like a sack to the knees or below. This solitary garment, according to the photographs I have seen, is always dirty and ragged.

I blame Tom, who is himself a budding ethnologist, for the fact that there is so little to report on our single contact with the Lacandónes. I, at least, have a good excuse, which is more than can be said for him. I do not wish and I could never pretend to be an ethnologist, because it is simply not in my character to go among strangers with a notebook and harass them with indiscreet questions concerning the intimate doings and goings-on of their private lives. I say this without personal pride and without disrespect to the important science of ethnology. The man who can, without turning a hair, go into a savage's hut and ask the head of the household just how he and his wife conduct their connubial relations is a man to be admired. Such a man has in him something of the heroic. But I am not such a man, and I lay no claim to such heroism. There is my excuse! But what excuse has Tom, whose life must be devoted to hunting out relatively unknown peoples and setting them back on their heels with indiscreet questions? After all, the Lacandónes, so remote from civilized contacts and so little known to science as they are, represent, from the ethnologist's point of view, the end of the rainbow. I main-

tain here, for the purpose of embarrassing Tom, that as an ethnologist he walked right past the pot of gold without even lifting the lid.

We had set off from El Desempeño ahead of the rest of the mule-train and had been riding through the forest some fifteen or twenty minutes when we came on a little bush-hut to the left of the trail in a clearing just large enough to accommodate it. This, we thought, must be the Lacandón encampment, and therewith checked our mounts. I leaned forward in the saddle to get a view through the doorway of the hut. Inside, a hammock was stretched across one corner, and in the hammock was sitting a specimen of that strange humanity that I had hitherto seen only in photographs and in the engravings of Charnay's book. It was a brown man, naked except for a loin-cloth, with long wavy hair hanging in abundance almost to his waist, an aquiline Mayan nose, and a beardless face. He saw us as soon as we saw him and immediately smiled a smile that could only be called sheepish, stirring uneasily in his hammock as if he did not know but what he ought to get up and run off somewhere. I cannot answer for the expression on my own face, but the man's shyness and embarrassment quickly communicated itself to me. "Let's go on," I heard Tom say beside me, and without more prompting I knocked my heels against the mule's belly. A moment later we had passed beyond sight of the hut.

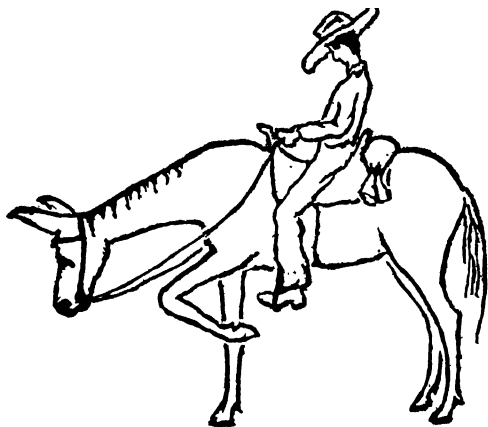
"We should have stopped and looked in," I said, when we were safely away, appalled at coming thousands of miles to see a Lacandón and then passing him up with so brief a glimpse.

"What could we have said?" Tom answered. "We don't know the language."

"I know, but . . . If I were an ethnologist, I would have thought of *something!*"

"Well, it's too late now," Tom replied. "Anyway, we did see a Lacandón after all!"





### CHAPTER XIII

I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED the chief point of difference between Tom's character and mine, but it will do no harm to illustrate it here. If Tom were set adrift alone in a boat that had been fixed to sail due west over the Pacific, he would settle down to the voyage without the least doubt of eventually reaching a continent called Asia, though he had never actually seen with his own eyes that it existed. Myself in the same position, I should be incapable of such assurance. I confess to being inwardly surprised and gratified each time I arrive in some place I have never been to before at discovering, for myself, that those diagrammatic drawings in the atlases represent a true geographical condition. I differ, in this respect, not only from Tom, but from the philosopher Kant, who was content to know, by the verbal and graphic reports of others, all about the great world beyond the city of Königsberg, which he never once left in his life. If I had been in his boots, I should always have retained in my mind a hard granule of suspicion that there was nothing, absolutely nothing, outside of Königsberg—that Berlin,

Paris, London, Rome, and the lands beyond the seas were merely scenes in the world's literature. I should at least have wanted the satisfaction of testing them with my own eyes. And that, perhaps, explains why some of us have always such a longing for travel, while others, like Kant, are quite content to remain wherever they happen to be. Tom, who has faith in maps as well as time-tables, has never known the urgency of *Wanderlust*.

Here are Tom and I, now, alone in the deep forest, with nightfall almost upon us. You must picture two little men on two little mules crawling in single file about the bases of tropical trees. We are far below the open sky, and we can see no farther about us in any direction than a mouse, on its scale, can see in a field of grass. There are no vistas in this forest that are not shortly blocked off by tangles of fern and creeper and by the profuse stalks of trees. You would have to accustom your eyes to the dimness before you could see us at all, for the whole scene has faded to that gray uncertainty in which form and color merge into one indifferent background. This is not day or night, but candleglow, an interval between the two. To the right of the trail is a long parallel escarpment of ragged rock that we can just make out. At one point a spring trickles down from the wall, tinkles haphazardly, and crosses our trail, forming a morass into which the mules sink to their hocks and over, so that they lift their feet, each foot in turn, with the plopping sound of a cork sucked out of a bottle-neck. We have been pressing our mounts anxiously, for fear of the coming night, but here we have no choice but to let them make their own slow pace. Monkeys, far off in the forest, are moaning dismally, and the air seems aquiver with a multitude of small sounds, all monotonous. Only

occasionally the soft cry of some nocturnal creature just awakening distinguishes itself. Shades flit across our vision that may be bats or owls, goatsuckers or moths. This is not a man's world, no sort of place to be caught by night-fall.

In such lonely and shadowy circumstances, riding through an unknown forest, what should the two of us, Tom and I, be talking about? Of course, it is possible that we might just be perfectly silent, listening to the sounds of the awakening night and the methodical punctuation of the mule's hoofs, peering into the increasing unreality of our surroundings, dusk-dreaming of others elsewhere, or cummuning privately each with his own fear. Actually we are indulging in a classic debate, fencing grimly with words in voices attuned to the monotony of the setting. Tom has peered at the dial of his wrist-watch and announced with finality that in fifteen minutes we shall arrive at Piedras Negras. I do not know that this is so, never having been in this wilderness before, and to me it seems that Tom's assurance, his bland air of finality, his tone of delivering an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, is obviously put on. If he had said "within the hour," or "I suppose," or "probably," or "if all goes according to schedule" . . . ! But to hear the man talk one would think an angel had stepped forth on a cloud and granted him a personal, exclusive, copyrighted revelation. I rise swiftly to the lure and, outwardly calm, inquire the source of such absolute knowledge—quite aware, as I do so, that I am being disagreeable. He responds by an unnecessarily precise and circumstantial explanation, pointing out to me, what should be obvious to any fool, that if the distance from here to there, being so much, may be traversed in so many hours

and minutes, and if so and so much time has already elapsed in transit, there remains, then, exactly . . . and so on. Q.E.D. But, I demand, how does he know his information is correct? Because all the natives agree on it. That, I assert in a condescending tone of instruction, may be taken to mean practically anything or nothing in Central America. Oh, no!—Tom begs to differ: he has observed the natives of Central America closely, and is persuaded, on the basis of his observation, that their accounts of distances may be accepted as reliable. This assumption of experience equal to mine is simple nerve on his part. On the contrary, I counter sharply, my much more extensive observation has led me to the opposite conclusion. Well, says Tom, we shall see! We shall see! I echo. And herewith the debate is ended. Silence ensues. I am glad to report that this is as disagreeable as we are to be to each other during the whole course of the expedition. When we arrive in Piedras Negras (fifteen minutes later) the crisis is past and we are once more boon traveling companions.

Satterthwaite had not only given us a letter to Don Víctor Pinela, the University Museum's caretaker at the ruins, but had, in addition, written him via Tenosique to receive us like royalty, give us shelter for as long as we pleased to stay, and offer us whatever we could use of the camp's store of canned goods. We found Don Víctor a young man, slim, civilized, neat, nervous, and in great moral distress at the condition of the camp, which had unavoidably fallen into ruin in the year and a half since the archaeologists had last been there. It was evident that the spectacle of the bush-huts with their roofs and walls fallen in, their posts far out of plumb, offended some deep sen-



sibility in his character. He apologized profusely, speaking to us in English, and then set about accommodating us in every possible way. We were quickly installed in a little hut on the bank of the river, which had here become a rocky cataract. At daybreak we were already up again to see what we could of the ruins before proceeding along the road to Tenosique.



If you look at a map of the ruins of Piedras Negras you cannot fail to be impressed by the magnitude and architectural opulence of the ancient city. But there is little overt evidence of it at the site itself. Despite the impressive complex of pyramids, staircases, palaces, and temples that is recorded on the map, the site has not nearly the architectural importance of its neighbor, Yaxchilán. The plan of a building on paper may be deceptive, implying, as it does, an elevation. But plans, often, are all that remain of these buildings, their superstructures having fallen and crumbled ages ago. In any case, there never were nearly

so many nor such elaborate structures here as at Yaxchilán. Most of the temples and palaces were probably roofed with nothing more enduring than thatch, and even where the Mayan stone vault was used the only vestiges of it are likely to be a precariously balanced fragment or a rubbishy heap of stones on the jungle floor. The practice of erecting buttresses and partitions is typical only of Yaxchilán, and accounts for the superior preservation of the stone vaults there.

Furthermore, Piedras Negras, unlike Yaxchilán, has been extensively excavated, and, in the field of Central American archaeology, excavation generally means demolition. This is unfortunate, but not to be avoided. The architecture of the early Mayas grew by accretion, the original buildings, over a period of centuries, disappearing beneath the additions that successive generations made to them. To discover these originals, and to work out the sequence of architectural styles, it is often necessary for the archaeologist to reverse the process of growth by stripping away the layers of masonry, one after another, till nothing is left but the verbal and pictorial record of what was.

Not architecture, but sculpture is the crowning glory of Piedras Negras. As Tikal and Palenque were the architectural capitals of the Mayan area, so Piedras Negras and Copán (with its suburb, Quiriguá) were the two centers of the finest stone sculpture the Mayas ever produced. Also, as there is a great difference between the architectural styles of Tikal and Palenque respectively, though both share top rank, so the sculpture of Piedras Negras is distinct in its character from that of Copán and Quiriguá. The raw materials available at the latter sites were sandstone and volcanic tufa, which lend themselves to round

or semi-round sculpture. The material of Petén and the Usumacinta region was limestone, which the ancient sculptors fashioned in such shallow relief, for the most part, that their art may almost be termed one of drawing. The craftsmen of Petén and the Usumacinta were supreme masters of the crisp and sinuous line. At Piedras Negras, however, they went beyond this, combining the typical low relief with semi-detached sculpture in the round. In a great block of stone carved with all the intricate calligraphy of their superb art, a deep niche would be hollowed out to accommodate, in all three of its dimensions, the seated figure of some regal personage or god.

Piedras Negras is also notable among Old Empire sites because its ruins provide evidence, however meager, of violence in its history. Elsewhere, if the monuments as they now stand may be taken as reflecting life as it then was, warfare and revolution were unknown; the only mutilation any of the monuments have suffered is the slow mutilation of time and vegetation, the only scenes depicted in sculpture are scenes of peaceable activity. At Piedras Negras, however, certain stones (miscalled "lintels" by Maler) that were, in their original state, evidently inset into the vertical walls of the buildings, depict scenes in which the principal actors are warriors and captives. One such stone, among the finest in the New World, was originally discovered by Maler in the temple named by him, "The Temple of the Lintels with the Consecration of the Warriors and of the Stela with the God and the Victims on the Platform Above" (since renamed by Satterthwaite "0-13"). This stone represents, apparently, a military chieftain in warlike regalia, with lance and shield, confronting a half-dozen fully accoutered warriors who kneel before him, and backed by

a subordinate though equally martial figure, evidently representing an adjutant. The figures are all done in flat relief, but stand out sharply from a plain background that has been cut away round them. Across the top and along both sides are rows of glyphs that are superb in the delicacy and precision of their carving. The sculpture is almost perfectly preserved, in all its original crispness, except in one respect alone. You cannot clearly distinguish the faces of any of the eight figures represented. Something has happened to them, something that left the rest of the stone quite intact. This would be strange enough if the case were unique. The fact is, however, that almost every one of the many faces represented in the sculptures of Piedras Negras has been subjected to mutilation. It is as though some obsessed vandal or group of vandals had gone through the city and deliberately hacked away the faces on all the monuments.

There is other evidence to confirm the theory of vandalism: walls that show signs of having been purposefully destroyed, thrones and altars that seem to have been intentionally shattered. This is as much as we actually know, but on the basis of it Satterthwaite finds it "only natural to wonder whether building and sculptural activity were not ended forcibly, either by foreign or local enemies of the ruling authorities." \* The evidence seems, at any rate, to point to the theory that, if the other cities of the Old Empire endured and finally came to their ends peaceably, Piedras Negras, for one, did not.

Don Víctor was courtesy itself, showing off the ruins eagerly and with a certain pride of possession. They were,

\* "Notes on the Work of the Fourth and Fifth University Museum Expeditions to Piedras Negras, Petén, Guatemala." By Linton Satterthwaite, Jr. *Maya Research*. Volume III, Number 1.

if not his actual property, at least his trust. For an hour and a half of the early morning we swarmed up the sides of lofty mounds, slashing our way with our machetes through the impeding growths of vegetation, discovering, under Don Víctor's guidance, heaps of stones, occasional sculptures, and sometimes a fragment of wall. Piedras Negras, it appeared, was better represented in the halls of Philadelphia's University Museum and in the maps, reports, and photographs that had been made by the archaeologists than at the site itself. By eight o'clock we had seen the best of what was to be seen, had shaken hands with our amiable host, and were again off into the forest with the mule-train to Tenosique.



This was not such enormous tropical forest as grows in alluvial soils. It was just woods, dense and tangled, dark and unbroken; but overhead, instead of the leafy green clouds massed above and beyond each other in receding banks that effectively screened the sky, the top was visible and not too far away. We had not that sensation of fish swimming in the darkness of oceanic depths, but rather of shoal-water fish moving with reference to the surface. The open sky was there, though not accessible to us. The limestone foundation of Petén, once quarried for the service of art, showed frequently at the ground-level; wherever the trail was steep it had been washed naked of soil so that our mules struck white rock at every step. In flat levels between the slopes the trail broadened into muddy sloughs, pitted

with the hoof-prints of bygone mules, through which our own waded with difficulty.

And what of birds and beasts? I rode alone, well ahead of the rest of the party, so that what wild-life there might be should not be scattered before I had a chance to observe it. But the woods were quiet. Occasionally, a couple of small birds might be seen pursuing each other in and out through mazes of foliage, darting from cover to cover and vanishing. There was little to hear except the quietness, the hum of insects, and the curious, faint, unceasing sound of dripping, like the ticking of watches, that accompanies the passage of eternity in any tropical forest. This was July, and the season of song and courtship was over.

I recall, by contrast, the musical medley one heard in the jungle of northern Petén in March. There were little buzzing daytime songs repeated with tireless persistency from invisible stations in the tree-tops, brief throaty gurgling phrases of larger birds, cries of hawks and jays and strange tropical fowl. At dusk and at dawn, in March, one listened entranced to the call of the tinamou—the long, low, unbroken whistle, like a mysterious signal, coming from somewhere in the depths of surrounding forest, holding its pitch so long a whole orchestra could have tuned its instruments by it, at last slipping down and simultaneously dying out, in the manner of the cicada's note, leaving a silence that seemed still to vibrate to the same pitch. This song of an unseen singer (or singers, since there would be several calling and answering), without melody, without any expression of joy or lightsomeness, without variety or skill except in its prolongation of a single note, might have served to summon cattle at dusk from the Elysian Fields.

Its very simplicity was moving. That unique statement on a woodland flute, with its dying fall, might have stood as the final answer to universal speculation.

But Tom and I heard nothing like this in the woods of Petén, now in July. The tinamou was merely an obscure gray bird, like a partridge, that sometimes escaped from the path ahead of us without being seen, though we heard the explosive whirr of its wings. The small perching birds, manikins and others, occasionally broke cover and vanished again, but silently, or only with a soft rustling of plumage. There were, indeed, cries, and momentary snatches of song, but rare, half-hearted, and unfinished.

In northern latitudes, the breeding season is universally governed, if indirectly, by the climatic season. Only in summer is there cover for nesting and food for rearing the young. The winter landscape is too cold and impoverished for breeding. Consequently, spring is the season of song, the time of courtship, the period (in human terms) of young love; summer the season of fertile consequences; fall and winter the seasons of sterility. But why should there be any such rigid demarcation of sexual seasons in the tropics, where summer is eternal and invariable, where food and cover are always equally available? Yet the fact is—and I rely entirely on my observation in asserting it—that among song-birds in the Central American tropics there is a definite succession of seasons, corresponding to those in the distant north, but without any like correspondence to variations in the immediate climatic environment. Since I have never seen this fact adverted to in ornithological literature, let alone explained, I must make shift with my own guess as to the proper explanation.

Point one of my argument, then, is that the northern

climatic cycle does have a manifest, if indirect, effect on the environment of Central America. Without a calendar or any verbal information as to the time of year, I could, sitting on a rock in the middle of Petén, tell you exactly when the season of cold and snow is beginning in the north, simply by observing the streams of avian refugees from winter's rigors that invade the country at that time. Suddenly, in October and November, the bird-population of Central America is immensely augmented by the arrival of birds that have just bred and been bred in North America. This increase is not gradual and imperceptible; it is sudden and dramatic. You see the flocks, large and small, flying south overhead, sometimes in such numbers that they almost do, in fact, darken the sky. And all at once the countryside is swarming with transients and winter visitants among which the permanent established residents seem diminished. The plain fact of the matter is, that from October to April the birds of Central America are far more crowded than from April to October. There is no actual diminution in shelter and food-supply, as in the north, but there is a notable increase in competition for these benefits. Consequently, the native birds, if they choose the most propitious time of year, must wait until the tourists have returned in the spring to their northern breeding-grounds before they, themselves, embark on the arduous cycle of song, courtship, and breeding. This is what I take to be the explanation for the fact that, when spring comes to the north, the birds in the south, where it is never anything but summer, suddenly begin to sing. Natural selection has operated through the ages to bring the sexual cycle into conformity with the climatic cycle in the temperate zone far to the north.



Supposing this to be the truth, it is logical to search out exceptions that will prove the rule. The annual increase and decrease in competition from refugee invaders obviously should not affect the breeding cycles of such species as, by their habits and requirements, are not in competition with the invaders. I call to mind, in this context, the oceanic birds that live mainly on the fish of the sea, because it happens that the tides of migration bring few foreign fish-eaters to the coastal waters of Central America. It must be significant, therefore, that such birds as pelicans and man-o'-wars have no fixed and universal breeding season, but are as likely to embark on their domestic activities in December or January as in April or May. I daresay that if data were available on the habits of other species—parrots, for example—still more exceptions could be adduced to prove the rule. But here the line is drawn by ignorance and the case must, perforce, be pigeon-holed.

We were speaking chiefly of songbirds, however, which live on insects, seeds, and fruit, and in that category the rule appears to hold remarkably well. In the highlands and in the lowlands, in the dense jungle and on the open plains, these birds generally begin to sing about the middle of February. By March, wherever you may go, you will see them busily courting each other, combating with rivals, and building nests. By April, juvenal birds are everywhere, still being fed by their parents. Then the season draws rapidly to a close and by July a Septembrual silence has already set in. Birds that all along have been showy, loud, and conspicuous, now seem to have vanished altogether; suddenly they have become discreet and defy detection.

Having bolstered fact with theory, we can return now

to Tom and me in the woods of Petén in July, listening for songs that remain unsung, watching for birds that, after the ardors of their springtime display, have gone into modest retirement. The woods are, now, relatively silent and relatively barren to all appearance.

That word, relatively, must be carefully noted. Remember that Central America is one of the richest ornithological regions on our globe. Guatemala alone, which has roughly the same area as the state of New York, has 736 forms of bird-life, as compared with only some 675 for all eastern North America, from the Mississippi to the Atlantic seaboard and from the Gulf Coast to the North Pole. The Central American republic of Costa Rica, with an area little over half that of Bulgaria, has more than twice as many species as all Europe. According to my calculation, Europe would have to have over 336 times as many species as it now has to be on a par with Costa Rica. I must warn the reader that this last is, of course, a specious use of statistics. I could, I suppose, likewise prove that the United States as a whole would have to have millions of times as many species as the acre on which I live to equal it in variety of bird-life.

Enough of statistics, those impressive figures that, under the guise of immaculate truth, lead so many honest men astray! Though scientists would quarrel with such a loose statement, it is far more accurate and truthful to say merely that Central America is full of lots of different birds. Tom and I are still on the trail to Tenosique. At this particular point it wanders through a wet area of dense vegetation which features a grove of cohune palms, broad trees with immense pectinate fronds that grow edgewise to the ground

and are arched, like scimitars, in their flat outlines, rather than in profile. The trees in this grove have not yet attained their full height, the boles are still short; but their heads, which, as in all palms, each consist of a unique spray of gigantic fronds, are full-size. They are like so many fountains of vegetation, springing from their sources in the black loam, spreading, and falling back to it. The grove has such a rich and formal pattern, in its arched fronds, that it does not seem to belong to the wild and haphazard woods in which it grows; it is too obviously ornamental. Its aspect, rather, is that of a cultivated garden in the wilderness, though in truth there is nothing cultivated about it.

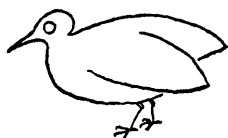
In the arcades of the cohune grove all appears dark and empty. But suddenly there is a movement of life. Neither Tom nor I would have seen the creature had it remained as it was, motionless in our path. But my mount has come near stepping on it. With startling suddenness, but in complete silence, it has shot directly upward for about five feet from the ground, like a huge gray moth with loose wings of some soft cloth, dropped down again, and vanished as it touched the ground. I peer at the point of its disappearance and, seeing nothing but dead leaves and humus, direct my mule toward it. Again the creature materializes out of the emptiness as it careens straight upward, wings beating noiselessly, and again falls to the ground like a wounded creature and vanishes. Once more I startle it, but this time it flutters off among the palms and I have lost it for good.

The knowing reader will immediately recognize the apparition as one of that mysterious nocturnal tribe of goat-

suckers to which our whip-poor-will and nighthawk belong—one of the *Caprimulgidae*. Birds of the night, that are known to most of us only as disembodied voices, have always been the subjects of legend and superstition. Owls and goatsuckers especially, because their voices have such a ghostly quality and because their wings are utterly silent, have acquired supernatural characters. The very name goat-sucker (*caprimulgus* in the Latin) is testimony to this, based on the age-old popular belief that these nocturnal creatures with their froglike mouths are in the habit of refreshing themselves at night from the udders of unsuspecting goats.

But ornithologists, who pursue measurable truth and abhor mystery, have long ago catalogued this apparition of ours. It is, simply, *Nyctidromus albicollis yucatanensis*. The subspecific name *sumichrasti* is also—I am glad to learn from Volume LXIV of the “Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History”—“available for those students who prefer to recognize . . . minute color differences in nomenclature.” The English name, for those of us who are not students and refuse to recognize any subspecific differences whatsoever, is “parauque.” Central Americans call the bird either *Don Pucuyo*, on the basis of its cry, or *el caballero de la noche*—the gentleman of the night. According to Dickey and Van Rossem, in “The Birds of El Salvador” (Publication 406, Field Museum of Natural History), the parauque “is supposed to be very much of a Don Juan, in spirit at least, and to exert a more or less malign influence over women; indeed his presence in the vicinity of a hut has been known to produce pregnancy in virgins”; which goes to show that even folklore may have a practical application.

Enough of scholarship now, or Tom and I shall never reach Tenosique!



At Tres Champas, as I had already done every couple of hours throughout the day, I stopped to wait for the others. It would not do to get too far ahead. Tres Champas, which appears on the maps to be a place of some importance, is actually little more than a name for  $17^{\circ} 16'$  North,  $91^{\circ} 20'$  West. In an area of some thirty square feet that has been cleared of underbrush are the remains of past campfires and three rotted lean-tos, about four feet high—the sort that are constructed in ten minutes by nailing a branch horizontally between two trees and stacking palm-fronds against it. A fairly large, rocky arroyo washes the edge of the camp-site and is undoubtedly the reason for its location.

I dismounted, for the first time that day, and listened. After a few minutes I could hear, very faintly but increasing, the clanking and tinkling noises of the approaching mule-train, punctuated by the rough shouts of the men as they directed the string of pack-mules. Tom was the first to come in sight along the trail. He dismounted and waited with me, for we were not sure that Tres Champas would not be designated as our halt for the night. The next arrivals were the honeymooning couple, the bride leading. She rode, not directly astride the mule, but atop the pile of all her household goods, including the basket of livestock, her short legs extending stiffly forward on either side, her skirt pulled tight above the knees. At every step

the mule took, the load teetered on its back and the top-most bundle gave little cries of fright and dismay. Equestrianism was not her line. Her husband, riding behind, smiled continuously and murmured his consolation and encouragement. Now, as woman, load, and mule approached  $17^{\circ} 16' \text{ N.}, 91^{\circ} 20' \text{ W.}$ , where Tom and I were waiting, the mule, miscalculating the distance between trees by about an inch, got caught by the corner of his load against a trunk and, seeing no better way out of the difficulty, lunged forward. The maneuver appeared to be successful, but it had come unexpectedly and thrown the girl, ever so slightly, off the center of balance. She waved her arms and gave a little cry, then fell off her eminence and landed sprawling on the ground below. When her husband, who appeared greatly abashed at our observing such a scene, reached her side, she was sitting up and whimpering like a little dog. The mule had gone off, chickens and all, to graze by the side of the trail. Tom and I discreetly looked elsewhere, pretending to be engrossed in our own affairs, while the boy, after much urging, heaved his bride up on top of the loaded mule once more. For the rest of the trip he held the reins and led her mule by the nose.

By this time the string of pack-animals had arrived, followed and stimulated by the two *arrieros* and Don Ulysis, who shouted at them mechanically and waved twigs in the air. Behind these, in turn, came four men who were making the trip on foot, their loads on their backs, and, last of all, the yellow dog, burdened with nothing more than his own natural trepidity.

Again I started off ahead of the group. The bearded captain of the mule-train had assured me that the trail was

clear all the way to El Retiro, where we would camp that night.

Toward evening the trail emerged from the wild woods into land that had obviously been cultivated, if patchily, within the past few years. It was overgrown with a dense matted mass of low bush and briar. Having been impatient all day of the slow pace of the mules over the alternately stony and muddy trail, I was tempted here, where the ground was hard and level, to bring my mule to a trot. Soon I could no longer hear the tinkling of the mule-train behind me.

The trail, as the arriero had said, was quite clear, except that at one point two or three other trails, negligible little branches, went off from it to either side. As the sky began to darken, however, it seemed that not only the light, but the trail itself was failing me. Now my knees rubbed the bush at both sides and frequently I had to stoop to the mule's neck to get through. I slowed down and finally stopped altogether, waiting to hear the sound of the mule-train coming up behind me. After a wait of some ten minutes I turned about and began to retrace the way, slowly at first, then faster. At last, when I thought I was lost for good, I heard the sound of men's voices and the rattling of cargo, but far off somewhere to the left of the main trail. "'Ola!" I shouted. "'Ola! . . . 'ola!" came the answer. Guided by the sound, I took one of the little branch trails I had passed by before and a moment later came into a glade of big forest in a bowl between hills. This place, unmarked even by a lean-to, with only a pile of cold ashes to show that man had ever camped here before, was El Retiro, a name on the map and our headquarters for the night. The mule-train had just got in and, not find-

ing me on hand to greet it, had sent out a search-party. Now another was sent out after the first. Finally, at full dark, both came in together, not in the least disgruntled at the trouble I had put them to.

If you look at a map of Central America you may notice that the Río Usumacinta, from its inception at the mouth of the Lacantún down to Piedras Negras, does not meander excessively. Beyond Piedras Negras, however, its course takes the form of a series of deep horseshoe-loops or scallops. It is in mountainous country now, constricted into gorges, forced to go endlessly roundabout on its way to the sea. Between P. N. and Tenosique it forms just two large scallops jutting westward. P. N. is at the beginning of the first scallop, Tenosique is at the end of the second, and where the two meet, about halfway between, the overland trail, which cuts straight across, touches the river. This point is El Retiro—The Retreat.

While there was still light to see by, Tom and I set off to bathe in the Usumacinta, which we found a couple of stone's-throws away. It was no longer a broad muddy flow of flat water, but a stony and turbulent stream walled by steep hills. The Usumacinta, it seemed, reversed the procedure of most rivers by getting narrower and swifter as it approached its mouth. The bank at El Retiro was a heaped-up chaos of large rocks with sharp edges, their surfaces green and slippery with algae. It took some skill and some luck, on such an unsure footing, to reach deep water without breaking a leg. But we finally got out far enough to duck and drench ourselves in the cool stream, then soap and scrub and drench ourselves again. It was an utterly delicious end to a hot day of riding through the forest.



We returned to our camp as fresh as daisies and, having had supper, set about hanging our hammocks and *pabellónes* between the trees.

That night, taking a chance on the weather, we all camped in the open, in a group about the campfire, with only the big trees for shelter over our heads. All, that is, except the Indian couple, who hung their hammock apart from the rest. At first the men in our group shouted at them in the darkness, challenging their privacy, to which the boy, and sometimes the girl, responded with good-humored laughter. They could be heard murmuring together and laughing softly after the others had left them in peace. At last there was silence and, a moment later, as it seemed, the camp was roused, coffee was cooking, the mules were being rounded-up in the darkness, and by the time dawn had become an established fact we were off again on the last stage of the ride to Tenosique.

Ten days had elapsed since our departure from La Libertad, two weeks since our departure from Flores, and for Tom the expedition was drawing to a close. This was, we decided—ticking off the days on our fingers—a Wednesday, and by report Wednesday was the day of the week on which the regular commercial airplane from Villa Hermosa, the capital city of the state of Tabasco, stopped at Tenosique. Tom was in his element now. It was just conceivable, he figured, that he could catch the plane at Tenosique, be in Villa Hermosa that night, take the plane from Villa Hermosa to Mexico City the following morning, and the day after land in Los Angeles. Here he was, at this moment, in the wild borderland jungles of southern Mexico and, it was possible, the day after tomorrow he

would be at home in Pasadena, with telephones ringing and automobiles roaring over metaled highways. It was a tantalizing but irresistible dream, and that morning, pursuing it, we deserted the slow mule-train. Don Ulysis rode with us, and we rode fast.

By early afternoon we had reached the outskirts of civilized Mexico, a neat compact village of bush-huts, walled in, as though against siege, by a picket stockade. This was Juarez—called, before the revolution, La Horqueta, and still designated as such on the maps. We reached it just in time, for at this point Don Ulysis's mule collapsed. It lay down beside the path and was unable to get up again.

The captain of the mule-train had warned us, in any case, to go no farther alone, for, said he, the old trail to Teno-sique had been abandoned beyond Juarez and the new one was hard to find. It seemed that an old bridge over an arroyo called the Polevá had recently been washed out and another constructed elsewhere. Tom, who was counting the minutes, would gladly have disregarded the warning, but the sick mule was another matter. We went into the nearest hut, where we were greeted by a tall, thin man with a little mustache and invited to make ourselves at home. The inside of the hut was distinguished by an elaborate crèche against the far wall representing the scene of the Nativity in little models and colored prints. Its presence was an indication that we had, as yet, not quite reached civilization, for the Mexican Revolution, in the state of Tabasco, at least, has destroyed every symbol of Christian worship within range of police-law. Our host, by virtue of his position just beyond the boundary of law and order, just outside the pale of the new civilization, was still free to worship as he had a mind to. His home was still his

castle, in which he could invoke whatever gods he pleased.

It was evident, however, that he was not a happy man. His health was delicate, and he welcomed our arrival especially, I think, because we provided an audience for the tale of all his ailments. The tale went on endlessly, while Tom peered at his watch, paced the floor, and looked grimmer about the mouth every minute. This delay might mean a whole week lost for him.

Finally an escape was found. Don Ulysis offered to go on foot, leaving the mule behind, since he could not carry it, and our host designated his little son to show us the trail as far as the new bridge across the Arroyo Polev. Hardly had we set out from Juarez when Tom, whose ears must have had some special sensitivity that day, stopped us. Very faintly, we heard the hum of an airplane-engine from the direction of Tenosique. For once, Tom had been the victim of a schedule.

Two hours later, in a great drenching rainstorm, we rode past a deserted airfield into the frontier-town of Tenosique.





#### CHAPTER XIV

**W**HAT SYMBOL WAS IT THAT served, in the original specifications for the universe, to denote Tenosique? There must be, in the realm of unapprehended words, in the unopened treasury of language, some unique word or phrase that would sum up the essential character of the town, making all further characterization, description, and comment superfluous. The Word, the Word that was in the beginning!

It is important to deal properly with Tenosique because it is, not only the introduction to Mexico, but to civilization itself. Emerging from the primeval wilderness, one views for the first time the considerable works of man. Of course, it is the back entrance we are taking; there can be no pretension here: no "Welcome to Civilization" sign, no display of native crafts, no hand-out of tourist-information. It is an improper, unsanctioned, unofficial introduction—but an introduction nevertheless.

Having just come in at the back door, I cannot well set off, here, on an account of the majesty of human civilization. This is a bit of human squalor—not representative, I

would warn any Martian, of man at his best. I should want something more than Tenosique to justify my kind in the eyes of an outsider. Not a material achievement, necessarily, but the outward sign of some heroic aspiration. I don't ask for much: a button will do as well as a church. But there must be something, something in a community of men that goes beyond the ordinary facts of food, clothing, and shelter. Men must have some aim in living beyond a mere acquisition of the means of living.

Tenosique is an outpost of human civilization, but it has not one redeeming touch of human culture. Therefore I would prefer to hide it from the Martian. It provides food, shelter, and clothing for its inhabitants; but it is also ugly, mean, squalid, aimless. I cannot find the redeeming touch. There is not even a church—and it is extraordinary how much one misses it. One isn't necessarily a believer, and yet it is something to have a tower crowning a town, the symbol of the higher aspiration that binds a community together. But I would compromise for a button, if only it could be found. For, after all, one must not ask too much of Tenosique. It is only a stagnant village on a stagnant frontier of civilization, a frontier that has not advanced or receded in a century or more. But the fact is that it did once have a church, and the building still stands. It may be that it is used as a schoolhouse now, or a storehouse. I didn't go in, so I don't know. Like the temples of Yaxchilán, it has outlived its purpose, and now it may be used to stable mules for all I know.

The earlier philosophers of the Mexican Revolution, represented by a particularly ruthless dictator in Tabasco, determined that the state alone was worthy of power, and finding the modern doctrine of materialism to their purpose, im-

posed it as an official dogma on the people of Mexico—acting, of course, in the name of the people. Thus—emancipated from religion, the masses became free: being free, they were ripe for enslavement. This is putting it more bluntly than the official casuists, who hold that the people are one with the state, that the government is delivered into the people's hands as an instrument. Honest scholars from Marx to Trotsky have satisfied honest men with this explanation. But to the ordinary man, who knows nothing of casuistry, the new democracy simply means that if you are an official of the people's government you represent the people; if you are not, you don't, and you had better look out for yourself. This church-building still stands—for future archaeologists, perhaps; others were burned to the ground by the soldiers who represented the officials who represented the people who were, in some cases, destroyed in their defense.

Tenosique is a little, scrubby village on the banks of the Río Usumacinta in southern Mexico. The right bank of the river here rises steeply to open plains, upon which Tenosique sprawls. Two or three muddy avenues, so wide you would rather cross them on horseback than walking, separate rows of low discolored plaster houses in the main part of town, which is not very extensive. The cross-streets are narrow and equally shoddy. Beyond the immediate central area, the avenues and streets degenerate into eroded ravines and pig-wallows bordered by mud huts; they cannot keep up even a semblance of respectability for more than a few blocks. The natives are such as you see in Flores, La Libertad, or on the banks of the Usumacinta: mixed breeds in cheap store-clothes. They are all part of the same tide of

humanity. Except for agriculture, cattle-raising, storekeeping, and so on, mahogany-cutting is, I think, their main business. It is the reason for Tenosique. The leading private citizen of the town is an amiable Spanish gentleman, Don Pancho Villanuevo. He is the local agent for the Agua Azul Mahogany Company and for the *Compañía Aeronautica del Sur*, the local airline. Our best advice was to throw ourselves on his mercy directly we reached Tenosique, and for this purpose we had letters of introduction.

Don Pancho's residence is the finest house in town. It is an old Spanish house on one of the broad avenues, with a portico to give distinction to its front. A doorway that is always open leads into a large bare room with a few wooden tables and chairs scattered on its tiled floor. Another, opposite the entrance, leads out again to a wide patio with a *pila* or fountain in the middle. Flies drone heavily and there is a thick atmosphere of tropical lassitude. We had to shout, in the large antechamber, before anybody came to investigate us. Then a boy came in from the patio, reluctantly, and reluctantly went out again to inform Don Pancho that there were visitors in attendance.

Don Pancho's most notable feature is his ability to inspire confidence. He has the air of an old aristocrat and statesman, gentle, dignified, and extremely restrained in his manner. He is a large man with a large face, white hair, and an aspect of immaculate cleanliness that contrasts with his environment. He alone, in Tenosique, appears not to be riffraff. Also, from his sober and courteous demeanor, his soft economy of speech, his air of detachment from immediate worldly concerns, he gives an impression of gentle wisdom. At the same time, he has the quality of tropical lassitude that belongs to his surroundings; he would much

rather, one gathers, do nothing than anything. You must urge him just a little, and very gently, if you want his help or advice. But he does inspire confidence.

As soon as all three of us had exchanged courtesies and were seated in the large antechamber, Tom and I pounced on the old gentleman with our problems: we must go through immigration and customs inspection, we must send telegrams to the United States, we must find a house to live in, Tom must have passage on the first plane to Villa Hermosa, I must have mules for the trip to Palenque. Don Pancho responded briefly that all should be arranged, then fell silent. His manner was such one would have thought that, merely by his statement, all already had been arranged. It was with him as with the Mikado of Japan: "When your Majesty says, 'Let a thing be done,' it's as good as done—practically, it is done."

We persisted, however, taking up one point at a time, and in detail. We asked, for example, when the telegraph-office closed, and so gradually brought Don Pancho around to a consideration of the feasibility of our departing immediately to dispatch our messages. At the telegraph-office, down the same street, we found the local immigration officer holding forth in drunken glory to a group of *amigos* who surrounded him. Don Pancho introduced us with quiet dignity, as though quite unaware of the man's condition. The immigration officer promptly put his arm about my neck and kept it there, supporting himself, while I wrote out my telegrams. I had practically to carry him back to Don Pancho's house when we were done, he murmuring drunken endearments into my ear all the way. He loved us both, Tom and me, for being able to speak English, like him, and promptly gave us the benefit of his whole vocabu-



lary, of some half-dozen words, which he had picked up while working on a ship with some North American sailors. Everything, he proclaimed expansively, waving his free arm and almost dragging me to the ground with the other, everything would be made easy for us. Everything would be taken care of. We should have no trouble at all about our papers. We could count on him. He would see to it that we were treated as became such honorable and distinguished foreigners. Trust him! He must, of course, communicate with the national government in Mexico City by telegraph, just in case we were spies or scoundrels, but he anticipated no serious difficulties. He wanted us to rest assured that he liked us very much, that he was, in a word, our friend, our *gran amigo*. And so we must stop to shake hands on it immediately, right there in the middle of the street, with Don Pancho looking on as though quite above any awareness, even, of the undignified behavior of Mexican officialdom.

In Don Pancho's antechamber our business was dispatched in a spirit of exuberant good-fellowship. Tom and I surrendered our tourist-cards and five duplicates each, but when the department of immigration asked for my passport (Tom had none) I refused it. This threatened, for a moment, to cause a rift in our new-found friendship, but the official took it more in sadness than in anger and did not press the point when I continued obdurate.

The next day, our tourist-cards not having been returned to us, we again hunted down the immigration officer and found him still deep in glory. This time, in proof of his friendship, he gave us back all our papers, including even those duplicates that were marked for dispatch to headquarters in Mexico City.

Having accomplished so much of our business in the first couple of hours after our arrival, we next pressed Don Pancho to help us find lodging. The house he found for us, on a small street down toward the river, was of plaster, bounding two sides of a large muddy courtyard in which chickens scratched and clucked disconsolately. Our room was large, high, and bare, opening through great double doors to the street on one side, the courtyard on the other. It had two beds, a table, and a chair; but, to our distress, there were no hammock-hooks on the walls, so that we had no choice but to sleep in the beds, a hardship to us after the luxuriousness of our own hammocks.

The customs inspector of the federal government of Mexico could not have arrived at a more opportune moment. It was Thursday morning, and Tom and I, due to part company the following day, had unpacked and spread out on the dirt floor of our room all the property of the expedition for division between us. A large figure in khaki, with a khaki sun-helmet and heavy boots, appeared in the street doorway. We paid no attention, as it was customary for passers-by to look in on us in this fashion.

"Buenos días," he said, after a moment.

"Buenos días," we replied amiably.

He cleared his throat, began to speak, cleared it again, and was silent.

We inquired whether there was anything we could do for him.

Yes. He wished to introduce himself to us. He was the federal government's customs inspector here at Tenosique.

We bowed and, indicating the litter on the floor, suggested that he feel entirely free to examine it at leisure.

Oh, no! he protested. He had merely come to introduce himself to us. He would not think of disturbing us.

We urged him a bit, having nothing to hide, but he was evidently embarrassed by his position and unwilling to insult us by doing his official duty. A moment later he departed and, after five minutes, there he was back again. He cleared his throat, excused himself, and then inquired whether he might ask if we had any cocaine in our possession.

No, we said, we had none whatever.

*"Bueno! Muchas gracias! Adios, Señores."* Again he departed, and that was the last we saw of him.





## CHAPTER XV

**T**OM WAS TO LEAVE BY AIR-plane for Villa Hermosa on Saturday morning. It was arranged with Don Pancho that I leave Friday morning at six for Palenque, taking two of his *arrieros*, Miguel and Diego, and four of his mules. After two days spent at Palenque examining the ruins—and this would be the high point of the entire trip—I would go on to Ciudad Emiliano Zapata ("Monte Cristo"—Old Style), a village on the banks of the Usumacinta below Tenosique. From Zapata I was assured that I could get passage on a plane leaving there the morning after my arrival for Villa Hermosa, where I had already booked passage by telegraph on the weekly plane to Mérida, in Yucatán, and thence to New York.

Don Pancho's *arriero*-in-chief, Miguel, was a quiet, stubborn lad with the round face of a cherub. He also had the kind of sullen dignity of expression that usually goes with cherubic countenances in adults, as if deliberately to belie them. Don Pancho assured me that this cherub was one man in a thousand, *Señor*, the soul of reliability, and sup-

ported him in his own assertion that he knew the way to Palenque as he knew the palm of his own hand.

"How far is it," I asked Miguel on the eve of our departure, "to Palenque?"

"Nineteen leagues, Señor," replied the cherub.

"And from Palenque to Zapata?"

"There are twenty-four leagues."

"How long does it need to go to Palenque from here?"

"Two days entire, Señor."

"And then from Palenque to Zapata?"

"Half day, Señor."

"But—how is that? You say it is farther from Palenque to Zapata than from here to Palenque. Yet you say it needs two days entire from here to Palenque and only one half day from Palenque to Zapata!"

"Sí, Señor."

"But, if it is farther from Palenque to Zapata than from here to Palenque, and from here to Palenque needs two days . . ."

"No, Señor. The distance from here to Palenque is greater than from Palenque to Zapata."

"But, you tell me there are only nineteen leagues from here to Palenque."

"Si, Señor."

"And from Palenque to Zapata there are twenty-four leagues."

"Si, Señor."

"Bueno, entonces! In that case the distance from Palenque to Zapata is greater than the distance from here to Palenque—it is greater by five leagues."

"No, Señor. The distance from here to Palenque is greater than the distance from Palenque to Zapata."

"But look, *hombre!* If . . ."

Without going further, I offer this sample of a discussion that continued for a good quarter-hour before I acknowledged defeat in lieu of any more direct characterization of the imperturbable Miguel. He represents, in its full flower, a quality of arrant stubbornness peculiar to the soil of southern Mexico. It is a hardy weed, this stubbornness, a thorny and implacable growth, and when you come up against it, as you do repeatedly, your best course is to abandon direct logic and go roundabout.

By the time of my departure from Tenosique I was no longer in a condition to look forward to the last stage of the expedition with any zest. I had still to take continual doses of quinine to combat my fever, and was, in addition, making heavy inroads into our stock of aspirin tablets. A severe headache, which had first manifested itself at El Retiro, had now become perpetual. But I could still sit a mule and, short of prostration, I could not excuse myself from coming so close to Palenque without visiting it.

We had agreed on six o'clock in the morning as the hour of departure. But I had been reckoning by what is known in Mexico as *hora inglés*, English time, while the others followed Mexican time, which meant they did not really expect we would get started much before noon.

It was after ten-thirty (*hora inglés*) when Tom and I stood on the bank of the river, once more on the frontier between civilization and the wilderness, clasped hands, and wished each other *buen viaje*. The Usumacinta, here at Tenosique, had again become a noble and navigable waterway; it had recovered its dignity as the greatest river in

Central America and now flowed slowly, steadily, muddily northward toward the Gulf of Mexico.

The mules were awaiting us on the high left bank, when we had crossed over from Tenosique. It would be useless my riding on ahead, because I would, after all, have to wait for the *arrieros* and the slow pack-mule at some point along the way; but here at its beginning the trail was clear, and I was sick of waiting, of cooling my heels hour after hour while fresh problems and fresh difficulties arose to delay our start. I was sure it would now transpire that something was wrong with the harness on the pack-mule, or something forgotten had to be fetched from across the river, and after five hours of this sort of thing I no longer trusted my patience.

The path went up the river along the left bank. To my right, as I rode, was a succession of *ranchitos*, low adobe-brick houses, some of them with red-tile roofs, some thatched, set in groves of citrus trees. On the left hand, only half-hidden by a thin screen of vegetation, was the river. The bank rose high above its level, so that in glimpses between the trees I looked down on the smoothly flowing water carrying its myriad whirlpools to the sea. The other shore was all hills, black with forest for as far as one could see.

The citrus trees at hand, with their hard, dark, glossy foliage, were burdened with globes of fruit, some larger than oranges, others as small as tangerines, varying in color from green to yellow. They were none of them recognizable to me as familiar fruits, but I sampled them all (when I was sure no one was looking), for the sun was hot and the path dusty. They were all of them bitter, tasting like un-

ripe limes, and I threw them away unfinished, sucking up just enough juice each time to wet my whistle.

I had already been riding at a leisurely sauntering pace for some two hours when at last the path swung abruptly away from the river; or, to put it exactly, the river turned away from the path, which continued on to the west. Several hundred yards beyond this parting, the path dropped abruptly into a declivity through which a sizable arroyo flowed. I dismounted here to wait for the others, and, when they did not appear in a few minutes, rode back along the trail to meet them on the way—slowly at first, expecting to confront them around every bend; but finally I brought my mule to a trot and so returned well over halfway to Tenosique before I found them.

The pack-mule, carrying my baggage, and the two saddlemules were moored to the wall of a small adobe hut. Inside, lounging magnificently in a hammock and accepting potions of some native beverage from the hands of the woman of the house, I found the incomparable Miguel. Diego was sitting on an upturned gasoline-tin drinking from a gourd. They saw me come in with expressions less of embarrassment than of disgust at being caught soldiering. I wasted no words. At last it was clear that only the whip of authority, only curt and categorical orders, would move these men. I would have to ride behind and drive them, just as they drove the stubborn pack-mule. Now I stepped into the hut and gave the command to march in abrupt military tones. It was only when we were started along the path that I ventured on a reprimand.

"But, Señor," Miguel protested in his quiet, expressionless voice, "there is plenty of time to arrive at El Zapote by nightfall."



"Didn't you tell me there are only eight leagues to El Zapote?" I inquired.

"Sí, Señor."

"Then I say we shall go beyond El Zapote today, for it is necessary that we be not less than halfway to Palenque when the night comes. What is the next rancho beyond El Zapote?"

"It is called Washington."

"And how many leagues from Tenosique is that?"

"Eight leagues."

"And there are eight leagues to El Zapote?"

"Sí, Señor."

"How much time does it need from Zapote to Washington?" I asked, avoiding a frontal attack on the truth in favor of a flanking movement.

"One hour."

"Then we shall certainly go at least as far as Washington today!"

We forded the arroyo and, some distance beyond, plunged into big forest. As there were no more habitations here to entice the men, I again rode ahead now, having first had Miguel's assurance that the path did not branch and was easily followed. At one point, in the afternoon, I passed an obscure trail, hardly more than an animal-path, as it seemed, that branched off to the right, but since the main path was broad and clear at this point I kept on along it confidently. Soon it emerged into a narrow valley that had been cleared, over a few acres, and planted to corn. At the near side was a bush-hut, and here, with company to pass the time, I stopped to wait for the *arrieros*.

An old, old Indian, with white hairs straggling along his chin and upper lip, dressed in the native costume of white

cotton pyjamas, came out at my approach. He greeted me with more-than-Oriental courtesy, smiling and bobbing his head as if delighted to see me, and invited me to dismount and rest myself at his abode if I would. As soon as I was out of the saddle he shook hands with me, then called inside the hut. Two young men came out whom he introduced as his sons, at the same time instructing them, in undertones, to shake my hand. The preliminaries now over, I mentioned that I was on my way to Palenque and would, with their permission, wait here for my *arrieros*, who were behind me.

"But, *Señor*," said the old man, "if you are on your way to Palenque you have mistaken the road. This road leads only to here." I should, it appeared, have taken that little branch trail I had passed by.

I thanked him hurriedly, shook hands all around, mounted, and rode quickly back along the way I had come. Miguel and I arrived at the branch together, from opposite directions. He had left the pack-mule with Diego and ridden ahead to warn me against the mistake I had already made.

We rode together now, but after half an hour Miguel began to feel anxious about Diego, who had never before taken the trail to Palenque and might easily be lost. He stopped and hallooed, in the strange falsetto tone that the Central Americans adopt for emphasis. It is a tone that I suppose must carry better through the leafy woods than the normal masculine shout, or it would not be so universally used. He called again and again, but there was no answer.

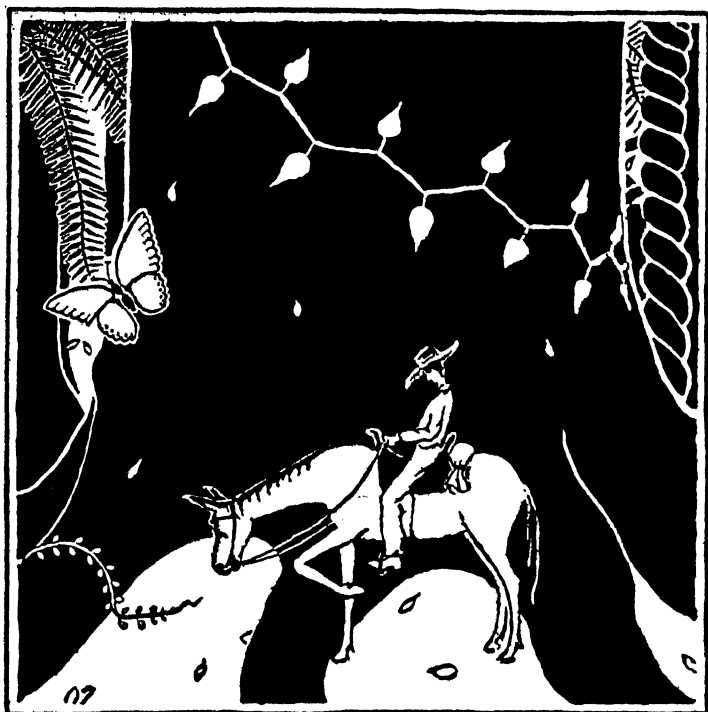
"I shall wait here," I said. "It is better that you return and find him."

He came back after some ten minutes, alone. "He has surely taken another trail," he said. "He is far in front of us already."

So we rode ahead again through the tall forest, trotting our mules wherever the path was sufficiently free of the roots of big trees to allow it. But the lost *arriero* with the pack-mule was not ahead of us either.

"He is behind and following us," said Miguel, as though he had known it all along. "I shall go back for him."

I dismounted, when Miguel had gone, and sat on a rock by the trail to await his return. It was already growing late in the afternoon and I contemplated unhappily the prospect of being caught by nightfall in this wild forest without food, shelter, or equipment. Occasionally some green insect, like a locust or katydid but far larger than any I have ever seen elsewhere, would come fluttering directly across the trail, blunder into banks of foliage beyond, and disappear. A *Morpho* butterfly, its wings a deep yet brilliant silky blue bordered, along their posterior margins, with bright yellow, flapped past me in quick jerks, rising and falling and rising again in an apparently aimless course through the mazes of vegetation. When it had gone for good, as I thought, it appeared once more, following an irregular course from side to side, up and down, as though it were searching everywhere for something it had lost. It came near without seeing me; then it was gone; then it was back again, still restless and disturbed, still forlorn in all its spectacular beauty. The moan of howling monkeys, like a terrible groaning wind in the tree-tops, filled the forest at its loudest, dying away only to swell again. It sounded like an anticipation of eternal night, the prelude to some symphony of the damned.



Miguel returned at last with the missing *arriero* and the pack-mule; our expedition was, once more, united. Less than an hour later we rode out of the forest into the open savannas. The evening was not as advanced, here in the open, as in the forest, but there was already a touch of dusk in the atmosphere by the time we reached El Zapote. The *rancho* appeared away to the left of the trail, half-hidden behind a swelling of the intervening landscape, a low and extensive dome of grasslands above which peeped the heads of a grove of trees and one thin curl of smoke. We rode over the hill and, just beyond the summit, came on a hut, a couple of out-houses, and a citrus orchard, all

in a plot no larger than half an acre. I did not dismount here, and would not even have consented to stop except that Miguel thought it best to inquire the way to Washingtón. His hidden purpose became clear when he himself dismounted and urged that we should stay the night. But Washingtón was reported only an hour's ride distant, and we could still count on that much daylight.

Over the hill, as we returned to the main trail, a pair of white-throated bat falcons were going through the exercises of their courtship. They darted repeatedly from the topmost stump of a large, dead, solitary tree, rose on snapping wings into the sky, raced and plunged in circles above and about each other, all the time uttering a repeated short cry, high and piercing. At intervals they would swoop down to rest on the broken stub, but even here they retained their alertness. They screamed from the stub, flirted their wings and tails as if about to take off at any moment, and finally did shoot away into space again, moved less, it seemed, by their own wills than by the matchless intensity of their inner life. Not even the peregrine falcon can exceed this most diminutive of American hawks in the bravery of its display, the wildness and power of its flight.



One hour after leaving El Zapote we arrived at Washingtón—or, rather, within sight of it. There again, directly ahead of us, was a low hill and, just visible above its crown,

a corner of thatch and a wisp of smoke. It had grown to be full dusk, and to one weary traveler at least that thatch and smudge against the darkening sky seemed like the well-earned reward to which the laborer returns in the evening from the fields. There it was, just over the lee, hardly a minute away! But here, at our feet, barring our way, was a river that should not have been at all. Miguel, at any rate, implied that it should not have been, for he showed amazement at its presence. It was not a mighty stream, but swift enough and broad enough to make an effective barrier. It flowed through a shallow cleft in the rolling grasslands and its bed was clogged with a matted growth of scrub. On the other shore, and some distance upstream, an abandoned pitpan was moored to the bank. It was covered, except at its extremities, by a low canvas canopy that sheltered the remains of a large engine. If we could get someone from Washingtón to bring this craft across for us, our problem was solved. The horses could be swum.

So we cupped our hands and shouted, separately and in unison, the two men in their long-drawn treble falsettos, myself accompanying in the bass clef. "‘Ola! . . . Ooooooooooh! . . . ‘Ooooooooooooohla! . . .'" We stretched our lungs and howled like wolves, with Washingtón a couple of stone's-throws away merely. We took turns, we rested, we resumed, until at last a little yellow dog came down to the opposite shore and looked wistfully across at us. From the corner of thatch above the brow of the hill, the smoke still curled thinly and serenely, bespeaking ease and comfort; but only the little dog came to regard us. And night was advancing swiftly now.

"It is no use shouting any longer," I said at last, my teeth beginning to chatter with an attack of fever. "You, Miguel,

will have to take off your clothes and swim across for the boat."

"It is better that we return to El Zapote," the cherub said in his quiet, imperturbable manner.

I was insistent.

He countered with a compromise proposal, that we camp here on the river-bank overnight.

But that thatch and that wisp of smoke appealed strongly to me. It fascinated me as the vision of an oasis must fascinate a man who thirsts in the desert. It was so close, so nearly attained!

"If you do not swim across for the boat," I said to Miguel, "then Diego must do it. It does not matter who goes, but we must have that boat."

"Let us try shouting again," said Diego.

"Shout as you please," I answered. "They are not coming for us. It is necessary to find some other way. It is necessary that one of you swim for it." The dog still looked at us from the other bank, cocking both ears to take in our conversation. My fever was mounting, my skin burned, my head throbbed, and now the first stars were making their appearance in the dusky sky.

Both men protested that the current was too fast and treacherous for swimming. It would be dangerous to make the attempt. They would not take the risk.

As a last resort, now, I determined on a bit of play-acting to shame them into compliance. "Very well," I said, with as much scorn as I could put into my voice, "if both of you are afraid to swim across this river, then I, sick as I am (great emphasis here), shall have to do it myself! I myself shall show you that it can be done!"

"Do not attempt it, Señor," said Miguel. "Let us return to El Zapote."

"No," I answered firmly, "we shall not return. If you are afraid to swim the river, then I, infirm with the fever, am not."

The two men looked at each other in dismay, hesitated on the verge of speech, and finally Miguel, whose pride had evidently been touched by the performance, decided to tell the truth. "We neither of us know how to swim, Señor," he said.

I was fairly caught in my own trap, not having looked for any such outcome to my act. So I set them both to work with machetes to cut a path through the dense brush to a point on the river-bank above the boat on the opposite shore. From this point I intended to embark.

The path was cleared, and I was just in the act of grimly removing my shirt when an Indian lad, lounging astride the bare back of a chestnut horse, rode down the path from the other side of the river and, without sparing us more than a glance, began to water his beast.

"'Olal'" the three of us called with one accord. "We are looking for a way to pass across," I added.

The boy looked up, fixed us with his dark Indian eyes, found us uninteresting, and looked down again at the rings of water that were spreading from his horse's muzzle.

"Would you have the goodness," I called, "to do me the favor of bringing that boat to us so that we may carry our baggage across in it."

He looked up again, continued silent for a moment, and then said in a listless voice: "The boat is not used." His manner implied that he was watering his horse and did not wish to be disturbed.



I inquired of him, with all the incidental Spanish courtesies at my command, whether there was some other way to cross over of which he could give us knowledge, whether there was anyone else at the *rancho* who might be of help to us in our extremity, whether there was some other boat or some other path. His reply was brief and negative on all points. Not only, one gathered, was the boat not used, neither was the river crossed. Then I lost patience completely, for my anger was rising with my fever, and curtly ordered the boy to get the boat, immediately, and bring it across to us. He did not deign so much as to look up in acknowledgment of my words.

I started grimly back along the path we had just cut, unbuttoning my shirt for the second time. But just then the horse lifted up his head, having had his fill of water. The boy, without a word, turned him down the bank and, some twenty feet below the path, rode him out into the stream. The horse lost his footing, swam, recovered his footing, and emerged on our side of the river. "That is how you pass across," the lad said quietly, riding up to us.

When Miguel and I had retraced the boy's course across the river, leaving Diego to unload the pack-mule, I dismounted on the other side, sat down on the bank, and told Miguel to go up for the boat. We had got across just in time. I was exhausted, now, and my head throbbed painfully.

Miguel went off, skirting the edge of the bush, and returned in two minutes to tell me it was impossible to force a way through to the shore where the boat was moored. "Nonsense!" I exclaimed, suppressing the rage within me. "I shall have to do it myself!" I set off, skirting the bush to the point where I judged that I was abreast of the boat,

then tried to force my way into it. After a brief but frantic struggle, I had to admit that this time Miguel was right. It was quite impossible to push through that solidly matted and interwoven growth.

I was close to despair by now, feeling far too ill to cope with the situation. Yet I could rest assured that I would get no help—not in the whole range and breadth of Mexico. Miguel stood with his hands hanging at his sides, leaving it all to me, completely passive himself, as if to say, “You are the only one of us who wanted to go to Palenque in the first place. This is your worry, not ours. Besides, we didn’t put this river here!”

As happens in such cases, my despair quickly resolved itself into desperation. Between the point where we were standing and the old boat, the bank was pitched almost vertically into the river for some ten feet above its surface. This pitch was solidly covered with dry and brittle scrub, and on it I now tried to find some footing. But the branches broke off and came away in my hands as I seized them to support myself, and I had to scramble frantically, clawing for a hold, to keep from falling into the river. I made slow progress for some fifteen or twenty feet in this manner before I became too winded to continue. Cannons were exploding in my head. My feet slipped out from under me at last and I dropped down to my waist in the flowing water, digging my fingers into the clay to keep some kind of grip on the shore. There was a moment when I thought I could go no further. But by this time my desperate determination to get the whole job done, to show these *arrieros* what could be accomplished where there was a will, had attained the level of fanaticism. There was even a grim sort of satisfaction in the frenzy of my determination. Once and for all, I would show Mexico and the Mexicans that

they could not do this to me! I shuffled myself sideways along the bank, digging my fingers in about the roots of shrubs, sometimes half swimming with one arm, and finally reached the boat. I collapsed over the gunwales and for a minute or two could not move for exhaustion. Then I pulled myself into it and looked about.

It seemed not unlikely that the boat would sink if I tried to take it across the river, it was such a rotten shell. The Indian boy told Miguel, who in turn shouted the information to me, that this would surely be the case. But I hardly cared any more. If it sank, then it sank, and we would have to seek other means. I found a broken paddle in the stern, of which only the blade was left, and, casting off, pushed out into the swift current. It was instantly evident that the craft was much too long and unwieldy to be managed in such a stream with that bit of a paddle alone. The current turned her about and in a moment we were sliding backwards down the river. I squirmed on my belly through the length of the boat, pushing the paddle ahead between the machinery and the canopy that covered it, reached the other end, and began paddling furiously. Again she swung about, and once more I squirmed through to the stern. By now we had come abreast of the path, where the baggage was piled, and were sweeping downstream like a leaf in a torrent. There was only one thing left to do, and I did it without thought: I jumped overboard. My feet found bottom and a moment later we had the boat on shore.

When the baggage and pack-mule were safely across, I left the two men to attend to the loading and rode at a gallop over the brow of the hill. There was a faint lingering of daylight in the sky now, little more than what would do to mark the horizon and show massive, nearby objects dimly. I rode through a herd of cattle, scattering them by

my charge, directly toward a light that shone from the rancho, and did not pull up or even check my pace till I was within the circle of its radiance. A hissing gasoline-lantern hung from the rafters of a deep portico that extended from the bush-hut. In a hammock under the lantern lay a slight ageless figure of a man with a narrow face, his feet crossed, looking up at me speculatively and puffing a *puro*, a native stogy, that he held between pouted lips.

I was suddenly feeling extraordinarily triumphant and exhilarated. "*Buenos noches, Señor!*" I shouted at the man.

"*Buenos noches, Señor,*" he answered, courteously enough but quietly and without shifting his position in the hammock.

"I come from Tenosique," I shouted, glorying in my own voice. "I go to Palenque. Will you give me permission to pass the night in your house?"

He saw then that I was not a native and, before answering, climbed out of his hammock and stood up. "*Sí, Señor,*" he said. "You may if you wish."

I dismounted and came up to him. "We had much difficulty passing across the river, *Señor,*" I said. "You must surely have heard us shouting!"

"*Sí, Señor. I heard you.*"

"We thought you might come to aid us."

"It was not necessary, *Señor,*" he answered imperturbably. "I knew you would find a way without me."

"And if it had not been possible?"

"Then you would have returned to El Zapote to pass the night."





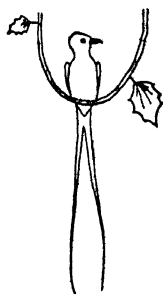
## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HAT ANCIENT MOTOR-BOAT

lying abandoned in the Río Chacamax, like the name of this rancho, is a relic of the old days of Porfirio Diaz, when foreign interests were welcome in Mexico. Those days are recalled the more poignantly now, because those interests, to which the natives of Tabasco and Chiapas then looked, in large part, for their material welfare, are today, more than ever, officially branded with the curse of Cain and sent as fugitives from the soil of Mexico. In the summer of 1938, following the dismissal of the great international oil-companies, the drastic action of the government was the topic of the hour. The natives retained the habit of identifying their prosperity with the presence of foreign capital and shook their heads forebodingly, remembering the days of Don Porfirio. The country of Tabasco and Chiapas had been occupied by foreign land-owners, chiefly North American, who brought with them a measure of prosperity not since seen in these regions. In the political chaos that followed the Diaz regime, which collapsed of its own senility in 1911, the foreign holdings became in-

secure and had to be abandoned. This motor-boat remains as the token of a material welfare sacrificed by revolution on the altar of Mexican nationalism. The sacrifice, perhaps, was not great, for no one starves on this fertile soil. But those who talked to me about it thought otherwise.

The master of Washington did not talk politics, and perhaps he was unaware of it. His situation was, after all, pretty far out of the way of its machinery. Besides, by the standards of the Petén and the Usumacinta, he was a man of wealth. The *puro* and the gasoline-lantern were symbols of prosperity far beyond the means of the farmers I had hitherto visited. All this northern end of the state of Chiapas—into which, according to my best information, we had now entered from Tabasco by crossing the Chacamax—all this is rich cattle-country. There is no comparison between the fat stock that grazes on these savannas and the lean kine of La Libertad. I daresay the pasture here is no different, but these cattle-farmers have a market for their beef that makes it worth their while to look after them properly. These animals are destined to be driven overland to the banks of the Usumacinta, whence they are transported in cattle-boats to be sold for beef in the markets of Campeche and Yucatán. But the cattle on the savannas of Petén are cut off from outside economies; they are valued only by what the Peteneros can pay for their meat.



Early morning anywhere in the tropics, but especially on the empty golden savannas, is a time of glory. The sun has risen or is about to rise and the reaches of the sky are radiant. The burning heat of daylight has set in, but as yet, in the freshness of the day, it seems medicinal, like a steam-bath. It dissipates the vapors and impurities of darkness. Soon the penetrating force of the sun will be an ordeal to a man riding exposed in the open grasslands. At noon-day, when his eyes are dazzled by sweat and he feels unsure in his head, when sodden heat-waves have begun to flow along the horizon, there will be moments when he has to call on his fortitude to bear it. He has the sensation, then, of being caught under a burning-glass. But at sunrise it is as if the gates of heaven had been opened on darkness and the earth flooded with celestial warmth and radiance.

The cattle, which had gathered about the rancho for security in the night, were in no hurry to move off when dawn came. They were going, yes—but they would take their own good time about it! Like stubborn children who demonstrate their independence of orders, they stood still, took a few steps forward when it suited them, and stood still again. The sacred white cattle of India, the few dignified zebu bulls with the humps on their backs, swung their horned heads and ambled through the lowly ranks of Herefords as if they remembered temple-bells and were aware that in the crowded bazaars of the East even a motorist would have to give way to them. A Hereford steer was gently removed from the path of a shining Brahmany bull who ousted him with one horn as though he had been a leaf. Then the bull, small head held high and milky dewlap swinging slightly, like a weighted curtain, stopped to chew his cud and consider eternity.

By seven o'clock, with the sun up over Tabasco to the

east, Miguel, Diego, and I were once more on the march. All along the southern horizon now, like a landfall made unawares during the night, an outlying range of the Sierra Madre rose darkly against the sky. Somewhere ahead of us, on this mountainous shore, was the village of Santo Domingo del Palenque and, on a shelf in the hills above it, the remains of a great Mayan city. Having made our landfall, it was unlikely that we should go astray now.

But we did go astray, and right at the start. To the south, the grasslands rolled down to a deep wooded valley that intervened between the savannas and the mountains on the horizon, so that looking straight away to the south we saw an immediate foreground of pale yellow grasses and a distant background of dark mountains, but no middle-ground, for it lay below the direct line of our vision. Over the hills on this rolling slope we now rode, taking our choice at hazard from a variety of little paths. "Are you sure this is right?" I would ask Miguel. "Seguro, Señor!" he would reply with quiet confidence. In shallow runnels between the hills, supporting groves of tall trees, an occasional *ranchito* nestled. We inquired our course at each one, but in the first two only women were at home, and they were too shy to answer strangers; we could get nothing from them. We found a man, at last, who told us we were on the wrong path entirely and set us off in a new direction. Another *ranchero*, at the next hut, insisted we had been right in the first place and sent us back the way we had come. A third offered a third opinion. And so we were shuttled back and forth from one isolated *ranchito* to another for two precious hours of the early morning, till we came to know the hills and their inhabitants as familiar acquaintances.



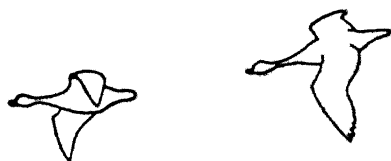
The right trail, which we found by returning almost to Washington, ran in a long line over the hills, dipping down at intervals into groves of tall trees that, at this hour, were radiant with light and alive with birds. We knew of our approach to such a grove, even before it was in sight sometimes, by the continuous din of parrots that came to us across the savannas. At a distance they showed up black against the sky, disorderly mobs of them flying in small detachments about the tops of the trees, all clamoring together, their myriad individual voices merging in one featureless and unabating roar. These heavy-bodied birds seemed barely able to sustain themselves in flight, they flew so slowly and yet with such a strenuous short beating of their arched wings. When we reached the edge of the trees the excitement increased, droves of parrots that had been hidden in the foliage took off to join those already flying. And now, at closer range, they showed their colors brilliantly in the slanting sunlight. Their heavy rounded heads were pure yellow, such a clean yellow as a canary's plumage could hardly match, and their bodies leaf-green. These were the great double-yellow-headed Amazons, among the most famous of talkers, which I saw now for the first time in their wild habitat. And I was delighted to come, so unexpectedly, on birds that I had heretofore had the opportunity to admire only in captivity. Of all parrots, for their regal beauty and dignity, and for their linguistic accomplishments, these are the most coveted. As we entered their precincts they would go clattering heavily off across the sky, masses of them, in search of some other grove out of our way, and the din would fade, retreating with the last of them into the distance.

One scene from the early part of that ride remains so

clear to my memory that, if I knew how to paint, I think I could reproduce it as accurately as if it were posed before me. It was such another grove of tall trees as grow in the clefts between these long rounded hills, but here the runnel that watered them broadened into a marshy glade which the path, coming down from the airy savanna, had to skirt for a short distance. The glade was so narrow you could easily have thrown a stone across it, and the tall trees on its farther margin, their heads supporting a tangle of dripping lianas, formed a luxuriant screen, an imposing background such as a painter would choose for the representation of tropical wild-life. The light, of course, was full on the trees, for the sun was behind us, and it had risen high enough by now so that it also illuminated the lush grasses and shrubs of the marsh below, with the stream running down the middle of it and not quite hidden by the stems of grass. Just as we were descending into this hollow—where, I was thinking, we might surprise almost any kind of water-bird, possibly a jaçana or a rail—I was startled by a sudden crescent sound, the regular quick beat of big wings, and at the same moment two Muscovy ducks, the female some distance ahead of the larger drake, passed swiftly between us and the screen of forest beyond. They passed very close and were gone in a moment, but in that moment the slanted sunbeams flood-lighted them so that every detail of form and plumage was limned with extraordinary clarity against the background of heavy foliage. Their careening bodies showed black, but their wide wings appeared a brilliant white, only margined by black.

I call these tropical wild-fowl "ducks," because that is the custom, but their great size and the powerful, fixed beat of their wings as they swept by gave one rather the idea of

geese. In point of fact, these birds are neither geese nor ducks, or they are either, or something else altogether, as you please, for there is no clear-cut technical distinction between the one group and the other. There are forms intermediate between ducks and geese as between geese and swans. These "Muscovy ducks" are larger than any of our North American geese except the Canada goose, but not adapted, like them, for terrestrial life. Nevertheless, no bird, excepting the common domestic-fowl, is commoner in domesticity in the tropics, where it takes the place of our own domestic ducks and geese alike. On the ground the domestic Muscovies are ungainly to the point of ugliness, their bodies shaped like barges, too broad and heavy for their feet to carry except by the clumsy process of hitching first one side and then the other forwards. They have short necks and shorter tempers, and the male has a little crest on his head that he erects to display his anger. Their faces are bare of feathers, like the face of a macaw, but red. It is only when you see them in their wild state, see the great goose-like power and directness of their flight, the bold symmetrical flight-pattern of contrasted black and white, that you realize from what a high estate their relatives of the barnyard have fallen.



The fresh awareness of the world, as if it were a newly created spectacle, that these tropical early-mornings arouse, shortly becomes dulled. The best is over soon, and in the increasing heat of the day the world becomes older. The

burden of the sun is felt not only by men, but by the birds, which, having disported themselves so freely in the freshness of the day, retire and become quiet. You do not see parrots again until evening, and if there are Muscovy ducks they are hidden and quiet in some woodland swamp.

The trail was, once more, through big forest, and I was riding alone in it, for now I did not care when the others arrived at Palenque; I could find my way as well without them. This trail was well and freshly marked, and for a peculiar reason. The government of Mexico has been laboring to bring forth, in this wilderness, a railroad, and here its bed is being prepared. The work has not advanced, as yet, beyond the point of cutting down a long line of trees through the forest and setting stakes in the ground at short intervals to mark the distance in kilometers and fractions of kilometers from Tenosique. Occasional work-gangs have set up their camps in the forest, and sometimes you come across small groups of laborers cutting brush. But the actual completion of the road is still so far off and uncertain that, to the natives, it is hardly expected. The government has never been able to do more than set aside small sums, from time to time, to advance the work a little further. Progress is intermittent over long years. But the first stage of the road, from Mérida, in Yucatán, to the city of Campeche, is already in operation, and track has already been laid at Tenosique. Who knows but what, within another generation, trains will be running all the way from Mérida to Villa Hermosa, by way of Tenosique and Palenque, through this forest? *Quien sabe?* But the natives are inclined to cynicism, and they doubt that the project will ever be realized.

Early afternoon, and again the trail emerges into wide-open savannas. Instead of irregular fragments of sky overhead, here again is the whole luminous emptiness, and somewhere in its topless expanse the blinding radiance at which you dare not look directly. The savannas are dead-still, like a calm sea in the tropical noonday. Here and there are irregular wooded islands, those farther off appearing always more extensive than those near at hand, for the path follows the open channels. The long range of mountains all along the southern horizon has come nearer, near enough now to show the texture of foliage, for we are drawing obliquely inshore, closing the angle at which we first made our landfall.

I rode over the burning savannas at a steady little trot, following the narrow brown trail ahead through the sparse grass, meeting no one, pausing for nothing. The visible expanse of the world about me was so empty that I might have thought myself the last survivor of humanity on a bereft planet. Such utter loneliness is hardly imaginable. Even the birds were scarce. Perhaps twice I saw a lone vulture floating afar off over the horizon; once, two fork-tailed flycatchers winnowing low over the grass; again, a kingbird spiraling upward to a point in the sky and falling back to earth; sometimes there was a small spurt of brown across the trail and into the grass. But, on the whole, these hours were the emptiest and among the pleasantest of my life, though it was something of a hardship to be riding, for I was ill.

My first intimation that the worldly world still existed was a long line of low telegraph-posts that came obliquely across the plains to meet me, when the afternoon was al-

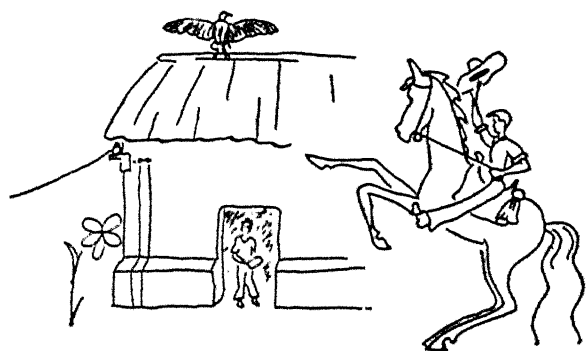


ready well advanced. From here on, the path set more directly inshore, toward the mountains, and soon I came among the first outlying herds of cattle. The path ran downhill between solid banks of trees, crossing a small arroyo at the bottom, its banks a morass of trampled mud where cattle were in the habit of drinking. Beyond, halfway up the round, smooth stock of a gray-barked tree, an iguana, extraordinarily like the medieval dragon on which St. George has set his lance in so many ancient paintings, remained motionless as only a lizard can, its little reptilian eyes intent on me. Its size was that of a fairly large dog, and frozen as it was to the smooth trunk of the tree it appeared like a monstrous prank of nature to match the inventions of men.

For the past three or four hours I had kept my mule to a steady trot, not allowing him to falter once in his pace, and now, as we came to the last long hill leading into the village of Santo Domingo del Palenque, I thought it appropriate to conclude ten unbroken hours in the saddle with a flourish. I charged the hill at a fine gallop, as though taking the village by assault, and drew rein, at last, in the green open space on the hilltop that marked the center of the village, before a plaster cottage which, since the telegraph-line ended there, I took to be the *Oficina de Telégrafos*.

A young man came out of the door and, inquiring whether I was not indeed Señor Halle, handed me five telegrams, one after another. Three of them were from Tom, one from the *Compañía Mexicana de Aviación* at Villa Hermosa, one from the United States of North America. ". . . have reserved one seat villahermosa Merida . . .

american currency plus \$2.69 Méxican currency . . . happy  
your cable . . . plane stops Zapata both ways only possi-  
bility is charter two . . . forty-seven dollars . . . wire pa-  
lacio Villahermosa. . . ." Yes—I recognized it all: this was  
the world again!





## CHAPTER XVII

**T**HE VILLAGE OF SAINT Dominic of the Palisade, to translate the full-dress name (though the revolution has undoubtedly reduced it, now, to plain Palisade), is located on the line where the deep coastal plain bordering the Gulf of Mexico meets the long inland barrier of the Tumulalá mountains. It is exclusively an agricultural center. There is nothing of the town about it, as about Tenosique, which stands at the head of a commercial highway—no shops to speak of, no mahogany companies, no bank-agencies, no branch-offices of transportation companies. Straddling a low rise are, simply, three rows of houses, some of them of plaster, like the *Oficina de Telégrafos*, but most mere bush-huts. Between these rows run two wide grassy avenues, used only by pedestrians and horsemen and livestock. At the top of the rise, a gap in the center row serves as the village-square, and at one end stands the empty hulk of an old Spanish church. It stands there, gaunt, bare, and abandoned in the rank grass, a dismal ruin still overtopping anything else in the village, larger even in death than in life—as ruins usually are. It



has about it the aura of a desolated splendor, like a famous beauty grown old and fallen on bad times.

Only a few years ago, Garrido Cannabal, then governor of the neighboring state of Tabasco, in his zeal to liberate the people of Mexico from the hold of religion, invaded Chiapas with his armed "Red Shirts" and ravished its churches. In Palenque it is reported that some eighty of the local Indians barricaded themselves inside this church to defend it and were every last one of them mowed down by machine-gun fire. This must have occurred about 1934 or 1935, when the red terror was at its height and Garrido himself was a member of the national cabinet. He was, however, politically identified with the old Callista clique that had brought Lázaro Cárdenas to power, and in 1935, when President Cárdenas suddenly shook himself loose of this clique, Garrido, like his fellows, was sent packing. To-day one corner of this empty church, which still has four walls and a roof of sorts, serves as a school. The boys who operate the government telegraph-office and count themselves among the enlightened proudly profess the doctrine of atheism.

Don Ernesto R., whose hospitality I had been advised to seek in Palenque, is, to my knowledge, the only foreign *ranchero* left in this part of Chiapas from the days of Porfirio Diaz. A German by birth, an American by naturalization, he had immigrated to the United States as a young man and established himself as a farmer near Evanston, Illinois. Some thirty years ago, he left his farm in Evanston and settled on a ranch here in Palenque to devote himself to stock-raising. By a combination of good luck and diplomacy, he managed to hang on to his property in the

chaotic years that followed the fall of Don Porfirio, when the country about Palenque was scoured by rival bands of rebels. These bands requisitioned his mules and cattle when they could, and there were occasions when he had to drive his stock out into the wild savannas to save them from the marauders. Though his life, as well as his property, was constantly threatened, he managed to keep on terms with the rival generals and so came through the chaos unscathed.

The ranch is, to outward appearance, quite like any ranch you might come across in Wyoming or Colorado. There are the same low, barren hills for a setting, much the same extent of sky. You follow a trail two miles out of the village, first through a small patch of woodland, then over the grassy plains. The trail descends steeply to a brook (the young Río Chacamax), then climbs the slope beyond, at the top of which stands a rather dingy frame farmhouse with barns and various out-buildings. Cattle and poultry are there too, the cattle chiefly Hereford (as in Wyoming and Colorado), though with an admixture of zebras that were, at one time, imported from India to Chiapas by way of Brazil because of their relative immunity to the ticks that plague all livestock in the tropics and their adaptiveness to the tropical heat.

Don Ernesto had gone to Zapata when I arrived at dusk, and would not be back till the next day, but his sister, who keeps house for him, was there to receive me. Miss R. was an elderly woman with a Lutheran disposition and an air of constant slight bewilderment, a unique representative of the North American Bible-belt in the less austere climate of southern Mexico. We bowed our heads while she murmured grace at the supper-table that evening.

The others at the table were a young Mexican engineer

working on the railway-project and Don Ernesto's daughter, a thin blonde girl of seventeen who had gone to school in Evanston. In token of her North American upbringing, and for the benefit of one telegraph-operator and two lads who taught school in the church, all three of whom came regularly to rock on the veranda after supper every evening, she wore white stockings, plucked her eyebrows, and did her hair in ringlets. She showed no interest in the domestic arrangements of the farm and, I think, was a worry to her aunt, who had never married or allowed herself to indulge in the small worldly vanities of her sex. The niece's Bible was a paper-bound book of popular songs from Mexico City. But her worldly veneer seemed only drab and pathetic in the rudeness of this rural setting. Her light hair and the pallor of her skin would, I daresay, have been ample enticement for the dusky beaus of Palenque, who could hardly have affected the rigorous standards of the corner-drugstore boys in Evanston.

The young engineer was worldly in quite another way. A native of Campeche, he had received his education in England, where he had acquired a degree of genuine urbanity that had reacted by contact with his crude native surroundings to produce in him the full flower of an exquisite cynicism. This, also, was no setting for a man of his caliber, but he comprehended his position more poignantly than the girl did hers. She hated Chiapas and longed for Evanston, yet she could not fully realize what she could not fully articulate. But the man bore the curse of Hamlet, he had words to teach him his own thoughts, and to him his native land was the worst of prisons. He was slender, dark, and good-looking, and spoke with a perpetual air of taking nothing seriously. The railway and his job on it, this coun-

try and his life in it, were tolerable only because they gave him cause for intellectual amusement.

Now, to any novelist who wants a setting and a cast of characters for a light novel of manners (with social implications) I freely offer this material: a primitive Indian village in southern Mexico, far from the world; two atheistical telegraph-operators; a gilded girl-child in search of a man; a pious Protestant aunt; an extremely intelligent and cynical young engineer—even, if needed, though with becoming modesty, a young American student of archaeology. To these will be added, in its proper place, the unique character of my host and compatriot, Don Ernesto.

It would be hard to imagine a more inspiring setting. In this respect the crumbling city of Palenque has no peer among living cities, unless such magnificently set jewels as Rio de Janeiro and Naples may be judged worthy of comparison. But ancient Palenque not only looks up from below at a screen of surrounding hills, as do these cities, it also looks down like an eagle from its aerie over the wide expanse of a world below. The range of forest-clad mountains into which it is set does not decrease gently in rolling foothills to the plains; its base falls abruptly, like a coastal escarpment standing out against the level sea. Surmounting it is a narrow flat shelf that rims the irregular summits of the range. This shelf penetrates back between the hills in a series of narrow pockets, and in one such pocket are the main ruins of Palenque. Little streams from the mountains above cross the terrace at short intervals to fall from its brink in a confusion of tumbling cascades to the land below. Several of the rivers of Tabasco, which is a country of rivers, have sources here.

To add emphasis to this dramatic opposition of mountain and plain, the lowlands seem to reach their lowest just at the foot of the escarpment. A narrow wooded valley, extending indefinitely in either direction, forms a moat outside it. Your first view of the ancient city is across this valley from a ridge on the opposite side. Through a gap in the trees, you see a small square clearing on the dark scarp of the mountains confronting you, and in it a compact group of stone buildings that glints like a jewel in the sunlight. Unlike all the other ruined sites of Middle America, most of which stand at hazard in the midst of broad plains or valleys, this one seems to hang on the mountainside, as if not men but eagles had selected it for their abode.

Instead of the usual shambling mule, a sturdy white steed was mine for the two days I spent in Palenque commuting between Don Ernesto's ranch and the ruins. This horse was fully equal to taking almost the entire twelve miles in one gallop, so that it was only an hour each way. But the last quarter mile of the way to the ruins was no galloping matter. Here the trail left the ridge and ran down into the woods. Two plashing woodland streams were forded, the trail began to climb again, and then, abruptly, it leaped straight up the rocky face of the escarpment, so steeply and directly that a man on foot would have had to use all fours for the ascent. There was nothing more than a series of shallow foot-holds mounting the slope. If a horse should hesitate halfway up, falter and lose his balance, he might easily go over backwards to kill both himself and his rider on the ground below.

"Pegasus," I said, hesitating, "what do you think? Shall we be sensible and go it separately?" But Pegasus had wings to his spirit, if no others, and he showed no hesita-

tion. He would hurl himself, and me too, to the top of the scarp, or we should perish together. "Adelante, then!" I cried to him, bending low over his neck as he charged.

It was all over in half a minute. By a succession of tremendous heaves from his haunches, each one carrying us to the next foot-hold up, we stormed the heights and gained the citadel. At the summit we found ourselves in the midst of the incomparable ruins of Palenque.

I had been here so often before, through the reports and photographs and drawings of others, that there was nothing in the city not quite familiar to me already. The topography, the plan, and the architecture, that is, were just as I had imagined them. What was strange was the greater magnitude, the more imposing scale, the larger beauty of the vision as I saw it now for the first time directly through my own eyes. Everything that Stephens and Maudslay and Holmes and Blom had described was here, in its proper place—yet the sky was larger, the air was more brilliant with sunshine and heavier with heat, the jungle was bigger and more luxuriant, the elevation loftier, the ruins grander, and the view through that window in the mountainside over the dim plain of the world below had more reach and airiness than text or photographs could ever hope to represent. The emotion aroused by the suddenly revealed scene was like the emotion of a grand passion, that cannot be anticipated by imagination or retained in memory. Of the first arrival in Palenque I can only say that it takes one's breath away.

No one could have portrayed more faithfully than Maudslay, in the "*Biologia Centrali-Americana*," the forms and dimensions of the ancient city. But he had said nothing of the immensity of human achievement and the

solemnity of death with which its ruins fill the imagination. Nor had he mentioned the accompanying music and pageantry of a life that goes on eternally and abundantly without regard for the successes and failures of men. When I arrived, howler monkeys were roaring from the surrounding hills, while two large white hawks circled and screamed over the sun-drenched ruins.

The valley or niche in the hills was some two thousand feet deep and wedge-shaped, so that its upper end was only a cleft wide enough to accommodate the bed of the creek that watered it. Its lower end broadened out into the terrace and came to an end on the brink of sheer space. Surrounding it, on all except its one open side, were abruptly rising banks of the richest kind of tropical forest, walls of lush vegetation through the occasional dark openings of which one caught glimpses of the white framework of trunks and branches, the whole entangled in a living mass of creepers, flowers, and parasitic plants. The floor of the valley had been cleared of bush by the government caretaker, so that from a distance it appeared as neat and open as a golf-course. A group of perfectly symmetrical terraces and mounds covered it, the mounds, raised up on the terraces for the most part, supporting exquisite stone temples in varying degrees of ruin, and an immense palace that, with its tower, its porticoes, and its courtyards, seemed a city in itself.

Over this valley wedged in between the hills, a pair of Ghiesbrecht's hawks circled on extended wings, at intervals uttering long piercing cries. Their plumage was glittering white, with a band of ebony along the hind edge of wings and tail, so that in the brilliant sunlight of a tropical sky or against the verdant foliage of the tropical jungle they

seemed utterly anomalous and spectacular, like denizens of arctic snows that had mistaken their place in nature. They appeared to be cruising aimlessly, sometimes roaming close by a fringe of the forest, again drifting out from the brink of the terrace into the radiance beyond.



As Tikal is the first great expression of a culture that has arrived at maturity, so Palenque is its last. Between the beginning of the one and the completion of the other, all the possibilities that were inherent in Mayan culture were realized. What existed before Tikal led up to it; what followed Palenque led downward into the eclectic confusion of the Mayan decadence. The road from Tikal to Palenque, by way of Yaxchilán and Piedras Negras, is the same high-road that leads from the spiritual grandeur of the Gothic cathedrals to the secular splendor of Versailles. At Tikal men had at last mastered the material world and shaped it to the full expression of their common spiritual need. After Palenque, the fulfillment of the spirit had been achieved and craftsmanship became, more and more, an end in itself. In the final Aztec phase, it was subordinated to the service of the omnipotent state.

Just as the temples of Tikal, different in everything else, remind one of the Gothic cathedrals by their spiritual grandeur and purity, so one appreciates Palenque with the same feeling that one does Versailles. It bespeaks the ultimate refinement of human living, the cultivated good-taste and competence of an aristocracy that stands for genuine spiritual sophistication. Man is no longer a youth-



ful spirit, deeply moved by nature and aspiring to godhead. He is worldly and accomplished, and if he is not already complacent he very soon will be.

Perhaps it is significant that, in contrast to Tikal, the principal edifice of Palenque is secular. The palace, raised up above the ground-level on a stone-faced terrace, is built in vaulted galleries about four inner courts. The galleries are double, each divided from its opposite by a septum and opening outwardly in a series of doorways separated by square piers. These long galleries provide magnificent perspectives. The most spectacular feature of the palace, however, is a square tower, four stories high, with an inner staircase, that stands in one of the courts near the center of the entire structure. The top story, at my visit, was inhabited by a colony of menacing hornets that had constructed their enormous nest at the stairhead, where one sidled by it at peril of one's life to enjoy the view from above.

The temples of Palenque, like the Petit Trianon at Versailles, are gems of architecture—a term that could not by any stretch of the imagination be applied to the Gothic cathedrals or the temples of Tikal. They are exquisite, rather than imposing; refined, rather than massive. They are quite content with the earth they stand on, and do not, like their predecessors, reach for the sky. Like precious jewels, they are beautiful and complete in themselves.

Palenque is also distinguished among Mayan sites by the fact that most of the sculpture adorning its buildings was modeled in stucco rather than cut in stone. The faces of the square piers in the long galleries of the palace and between the doorways of the temples, the sloping upper façades (or roofs), and the roof-combs, all served as panels

for the display of this sculpture, which was originally painted in a variety of harmonious colors, traces of which remain today. In its profusion of forms, in its free-flowing lines, in the cultivated taste of its composition, in the sheer elegance of its conception, it has something in common with the rococo decoration of the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. The severity and the sullen, primitive stolidity of earlier days has given way to the lightness and refinement of a sophisticated people. The earlier gods (if they are gods) in the sculptures of Tikal, Copán, Quiriguá, seem to represent great natural forces, the forces that cause the maize to grow and the rain to fall; these gods, here at Palenque, are the members of an elegant aristocracy that rules gracefully over the destinies of men. There is a touch of courtliness about them that you do not find in their more barbaric forerunners. Like the buildings that support them, they represent the end and goal of a great cultural development.

I first saw Don Ernesto on the second evening of my stay at Palenque. He was waiting for me on the veranda of the ranch-house with an air of eagerness such as a bird of prey might show at the prospect of a carrion-feast. In appearance, too, he was a bird of prey; not a trim falcon or modest kite, but a clumsier species, something between the eagles and the vultures: a great carrion-bird, its nose grown long with eagerness. The nose, actually, was bony and aggressive, cradling a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles which enlarged the deep-set eyes that lay in the shelter on either side. The bare skin of the cheeks had a leathery texture and was deeply lined, as if the nose, pushing out, had stretched it taut.

He jumped up from where he was sitting and came down the path to greet me. With waving arms, he immediately backed me up the veranda-steps and into the rocking-chair he had just deserted. Then, standing over me and leaning forward to get his face as close to mine as possible, he shouted: "Vell, die Rooshens und Japs haff declared var! Vat do you dink of dat?"

You can imagine the shock this was to me. For a month I had had no news at all; this was my very first word on what had been happening in the world at large. Besides, I had just been poking about all day in the remote ruins of a civilization dead and abandoned for a thousand years. It was no time to bring the present crashing about my ears like this.

"Var!" he shrieked, waving his arms like a vulture flapping its wings. "It is Var!"

I don't know what I answered, or if I answered anything. The man's grotesquely magnified eyes, staring directly into mine at close range, fascinated me. I wanted to back away a bit, to recover my presence of mind and consider the implications of world-catastrophe, but he held me helpless in the armchair before him, as if I had been the Wedding-guest and he the Ancient Mariner.

"Und Germany is going to swallow up Czechoslovakia now qvick—nudding can shtop her!" he continued, taking me by surprise again with another lightning-stroke.

Don Ernesto's hobby, it appeared, was international affairs, and he should have been well-informed on them. He had a short-wave radio-set in the hall of his house, and listened, with the most rapt attention, to all the news broadcasts from Berlin, London, and Mexico City. But he was an artist and an impressionist, rather than a political

scientist; nothing ever happened in the world that he did not interpret as a great crashing drama, paying scant attention to detail. I don't think he had a very clear idea of where Czechoslovakia was, or what issues there might be between Russia and Japan. The whole business was, at best, a sporting contest to him. He knew the names and numbers of the chief players, nothing else. It never entered his mind that war might bring disaster to anyone, that there was a grim reality behind the game. What he referred to as the new Russo-Japanese War was, I later learned from the news broadcasts, merely some desultory fighting on the Amur River, and Germany's Czechoslovakian coup was still a year off.

Throughout my last two evenings at the ranch, I continued to be the target for Don Ernesto's harangues. But he showed himself as great in his moral judgments as in his appraisal of facts. One opinion served him as well as another, so long as it fed his oratory.

"Die Jews," he shouted, backing me into a corner, his arms swinging, "die Jews is behind all dis trouble in Europe und die United Shtates!"

I managed to take a mild exception to this.

"Look at J. P. Morgan!" he shouted back at me. "He started die vurld-depression."

"He's not a Jew," I said.

"Not a Jew!"

"No."

"Vell, den—it's dot Hitler! Dot crazy man! Vat does he tink die Jews should do—get off die earth? Dey mind der own business—so vy should he not mind his? Crazy man! Always it is die Jews, die Jews! Dey don't hurt nobody. It is dot crazy man!

"But now it giffs fighting," he added with expansive satisfaction. "Germany goes to var against Roosha, Roosha against die Japs, und England goes to var mit Hitler to save Czechoslovakai."

His harangues were rich in rhetorical questions, each one followed by the same standard gesture. He would step back a pace and swing both arms wide, while his face lighted up with a joy so exultant that it had the devilish aspect of something unholy. The lenses of his spectacles, as if they had been goldfish-bowls, distorted and magnified his triumphant eyes. He would wait a moment in this position for me to answer the unanswerable, then step forward at me and, shaking his open hand under my nose, resume the harangue. In other moods, he would start to walk away, then round suddenly upon me when I was off my guard, simultancously hurling a bombshell of rhetoric at my head. That done, he would step back triumphantly to survey the wreckage. The more nonplused I became, the more Titantic was his delight. But he never again succeeded in shocking me as he had with his original declaration of war.





## CHAPTER XVIII

PROMPTLY AT SIX O'CLOCK IN the morning I was on horseback; with equal promptness, at twelve noon, I rode into what was till recently known as the village of Monte Cristo—now Ciudad Emiliano Zapata. For six hours (to the minute) I had maintained a steady trot over flat grassy plains, following the line of telegraph-posts that led out of Palenque. Toward the end, the plains had appeared sprinkled with cattle in every direction, as far as I could see. From the top of a hill I looked down, at last, on the broad Usumacinta flowing with the dignity of a great river through a country of marshes, fields, and farmlands. A cloud of *zopilotes* (black vultures), high overhead, showed as a dense swarm of black specks circling about each other. In their midst—and this was what brought me to a stop for the first time that morning—was one speck distinguished from the rest by its larger size and creamy-white coloration. Well met at last! Here, above me, was *Sarcorhamphus papa*, the great king vulture, who had been featured in the informal prospectus of the expedition with

which I had originally enticed Tom into joining me. Now that Tom was gone, he appeared at last!

Such a unique and spectacular creature as the king vulture should be one of the famous birds of the American tropics; but he has been traditionally overlooked by travelers, who, like other varieties of mankind, tend to note only what has already been noted. Parrots and hummingbirds, condors and quetzals, cocks-of-the-rock—these are the birds of which the visitor will be expected, if possible, to bring back reports. The travel-writer borrows established magic from their names to enrich his memoirs. But no magic has been established for the name of king vulture, it offers no fame ready to hand; consequently he must be independently observed and described in his own right—or, what is easier, left out of account altogether.

The popular writers who have extensively described the land-birds of tropical America from original observation might almost be numbered on the index finger of one hand. W. H. Hudson claims the chief notability in this respect. I doubt that an instance could be found in his writing where he has mentioned the name of a bird purely for the sake of the associations that name can be depended on to evoke in the mind of the reader. There is always some peculiar and original observation of appearance or behavior, no matter how brief, that stamps even an anonymous bird with a unique specific character. But the general practice, followed by the distinguished popular naturalists as well as mere lay travelers, is to rely almost entirely on the magic of names. "A band of blue macaws flew overhead," writes the traveler, and the reader is automatically thrilled. "I sat entranced," writes the poetical naturalist, "as the song of the nightingale was poured out upon the night," and

the reader is thereby richly satisfied. Nothing in nature-writing is rarer than actual description of nature.

The king vulture ranges throughout the American tropics, but he is never found in the large aggregations characteristic of the black and turkey vultures. His custom, it appears, is to glide close over the top of the forest, where he cannot ordinarily be seen except from an airplane. Occasionally, however, as in this case, you will spot one lone individual circling overhead through a flock of the common black vultures; or you may see one perched motionless, solid, broad-shouldered, and erect, on a horizontal limb at the edge of a clearing. Close to, he is most spectacular, for, beside his size and the creamy white plumage trimmed with black that distinguishes him from the somber buzzards, the naked skin of the head and chest shows up in all its garish colors. It is as if some painter in oils had used it for his palette. From the midst of a motley of reds, orange-reds, oranges, yellows, yellow-oranges, and blues, a startlingly hard white eye that might be of bone, with a black center, looks coldly out at you. The big hooked bill, daubed in red, orange, and black, is surmounted by an erect orange caruncle. A slaty gray ruff of feathers divides the painted head from the main dress of creamy plumage that covers the body. In the sky, where you are most likely to see him, the king vulture has a peculiarly heavy and ungraceful appearance. His wings are broad and rounded at the ends and, when outstretched for soaring, seem to rake forward at a pronounced angle. Like all vultures, he has a relatively small head, and this, combined with the square-cut shortness of his black tail and the extreme breadth of his stumpy wings, gives the effect of two large flying-sails held outward and forward from a central axis.



But he is imposing in the contrast of his size and color with the common black vultures in whose company he is most often observed; it is easy to see how he has earned the vernacular title of "king of the vultures" (*rey de zopilotes*) by which the natives know him.



The agonizing persistence of my headache had succeeded in reducing me to a pettish state of mind by the time I reached Zapata. I had only two immediate objectives in the village: one, to buy passage on the airplane to Villa Hermosa, which was to leave the following day; the other, a long drink of beer. I had not tasted beer since leaving Tenosique, and all morning long, riding over the hot savannas, I had sustained my spirit against the assault of the sun by contemplating the cold foaming brew that would be the reward of this ordeal by fire. For, as the Shropshire lad knew, "malt does more than Milton can to justify God's ways to man."

Now I trotted through the cobbled streets of the village, stopping once or twice to ask loiterers where I could find Don Teodoro, the local agent for the airplane-company, to whom Don Ernesto had given me a letter of introduction.

One would have thought that, in his entire career as agent for the *Compañía Aeronautica del Sur*, this was the first time Don Teodoro had been called upon to function in that capacity. It was noon, exactly, when I found him,

but he had not gone home yet. He was just closing up his little dry-goods shop as I appeared in the doorway and presented my letter across the counter. A small, white-haired man, he had watery-weak blue eyes and the nervous mannerisms of a rabbit. He would have run away from me, I think, had not the counter blocked him. My request for passage seemed to put him out and, evidently just to be rid of me, he promptly expressed his feeling that the weekly airplane already had its full quota of passengers. I should have to wait till the week after.

I had been afraid of this all along, despite the earnest assurances Don Pancho had given me in Tenosique that the plane was never full, that there could be no possible trouble in getting the passage when I arrived in Zapata. I had suspected at the time that this was merely to save himself the bother of selling me a ticket. If Don Teodoro were right, the situation was more serious than one might suppose. Not only was I very ill, by now, in a land where I had to depend entirely on my own ebbing energy and resourcefulness, but I had already arranged by telegraph for passage all the way to New York, departing on the plane from Villa Hermosa to Yucatán two days after my arrival in Zapata, and I had to be in Villa Hermosa to pay for the passage not later than the following day.

I immediately impressed Don Teodoro with the urgency of the business.

"But if the airplane already is filled up! . . ." He tried to avoid looking at me as he spoke but could find nothing else to hold his eyes, and this made him increasingly uneasy.

"Do you know that it is filled up?" I asked.

"How know that for certain?"

"Well, then—let us determine it!"

"But—if one does not know! . . . Next week, certainly, there will be a place for you."

"You must have some way to find out about the plane of tomorrow!"

"But that can only be done by sending a special telegram to Villa Hermosa!" he said, implying that surely no sensible man would expect him to go to such a length.

I got him to agree to an immediate telegram, and it was arranged that we should meet at his shop again at two o'clock, when an answer should have arrived from Villa Hermosa. Then I set out in the quest of my Holy Grail.

The village of Zapata is about the size of Tenosique, but it crowds more closely against the waterfront. It sprawls less and is a trifle neater, its streets cobbled for the most part and its plaster buildings tinted in blues, greens, and yellows. But it gives one that feeling of an utter desolation, a hot little emptiness, a small brooding aimlessness, that characterizes all these isolated villages in the tropics. The thought of spending more than a day, or even as much as a day, confined in such a setting is appalling, merely because there is nothing to do and nowhere to go and no one to communicate with intelligibly—because all one's aims and energies are constantly frustrated, not only by the lethargy of the climate but by the soullessness, the spiritual vacuity, the utter negation of the atmosphere that surrounds one. It is like being locked up alone and made to pass the time in a small room without windows, without doors, without furniture of any description, without decorations on the walls or even a rug on the floor. The wilderness, on the one hand, and the big cities, on the other, are alive and moving; but the little dead and desolate villages

are so many concentrations of nothingness. The inhabitants are like cart-horses waiting between the shafts for someone, who will never come, to give them energy and purpose. They can spend all day just looking at a blank wall, without interest and without boredom. They have nothing and want for nothing. Or if they want anything, it is merely to be left alone. The persons who believe that the high pressure of living in a city like New York is a strain on the nerves should try the pressureless living of one of these tropical villages. They might go mad within a month. Aside from all ulterior considerations, I thought with horror of the possibility that I should have to spend a whole week in this Ciudad Emiliano Zapata.

If you want help or advice in one of these villages, the best thing is to get hold of some small boy. A small boy is bound to be unreliable, but he has not yet grown into that state of apathy characteristic of his elders; he still has curiosity, and a sense of adventure that allows him to enjoy contact with a traveler from strange lands. Thank God for little urchins! The one I found was eager to lead me to some place where beer was obtainable—though he should have known, what I discovered later, that it was unobtainable anywhere in Zapata. He guided me zealously about the village, from one *tienda* to another where he was quite sure beer might be had. As likely as not, he did not even know what beer was. One house, which we found tightly shuttered, he insisted was a fountainhead of beer, and would surely, surely open its doors at the two hours, when the siesta-period was ended! Actually, it remained shuttered and dead all the time I was in the village, though I returned to it persistently in every leisure moment I had.

The local inn was a two-story plaster building near the

waterfront. One long hall comprised the entire second floor, divided by cheese-cloth screens into little cubicles, each with a crude wooden bedstead, though without a mattress. Having taken one of the cubicles for overnight, I found a bit of a waterfront dining-room and had an excellent meal of chile, rice, and tamales.

Two o'clock. I was at Don Teodoro's tienda promptly, just as his partner, a lean man with a drawn gray face, arrived to open up. At a quarter to three Don Teodoro had not yet appeared and the lean man advised me to give up hope for him. But a telegram that had come from Villa Hermosa for Don Teodoro lay on the counter, and over the shocked protests of his partner I took it upon myself to open and read it. It was from the airplane company, and informed Don Teodoro briefly that all places were taken on the plane.

My next move was (through Don Teodoro, I hoped) to find out the cost of chartering a special plane for the morrow—also the list of passengers for the regular plane, on the chance that I might buy a passage second-hand. A little child, again, was selected to lead me to Don Teodoro's home, which we found at the other end of the village, an adobe hut within which a dusky woman was busily stitching while a whole pack of children, babies, and dogs rolled about on the earth-floor. Don Teodoro's woman retorted, on inquiry, that her man had gone off to Finca Esmeralda, a ranch five miles out of town, and would not be back till the next day, if then. She hardly glanced up from her stitching to break the news of his escape.

I flatter myself that I remained outwardly calm during our return to the shop. I was urging upon myself the need of calm all the way: one must remain calm, calm . . . not

get excited! But inwardly I felt myself strained to the breaking point with the sort of implacable exasperation a child feels when it is constantly and constantly frustrated at everything it tries to do. I wanted to smash something. It was not only the intense pain in my head, the heat, the fact that I could get no beer for all my searching, and the apparent conspiracy among the villagers to avoid giving me any aid or comfort. What I resented chiefly was the utter indifference of everyone to my own urgency, their inability to realize it. I wanted at least to make a scene, create a stir in the dust of this graveyard, and when we got back to the *tienda* I did just that.

"Don Teodoro has left the village," I stated abruptly to the lean partner behind the counter. "He has gone off to Finca Esmeralda!"

The lean man shrugged his shoulders. "It was to be expected," he said in a tone of quiet boredom, as if I had been a fool not to know it.

"Don Teodoro—" I answered, slapping my hand down hard on the counter, so that he jumped and became alert, possibly for the first time in his life, "Don Teodoro will regret breaking his appointment with me. He will regret it very much!" For a moment we both stared at each other in a sort of dazed silence. I was as startled by my own temper-tantrum as he was. A dog yapped somewhere, but otherwise the dusty silence remained unbroken.

"Señor, he—he . . . It is natural. Don Teodoro is like that." His voice was panicky.

"Perhaps," I answered. "But this time he has mistaken his man. I am an official of the North American police, traveling in Mexico on government business, and I have to be in the city of New York, in the United States of

North America, for an important conference on Saturday morning. If Don Teodoro is responsible for delaying me, he shall pay for it." I followed up this outrageous statement with an unmistakable and menacing implication of international repercussions.

The long face of the lean man turned from gray to white. He still stared across the counter at me with a glazed expression. "Don Teodoro—he did not understand, Señor—we none of us—understood," he babbled. "Besides, Don Teodoro is a man without faith—you cannot place confidence in him. He is like that. . . ."

"What he has done he has done," I stated flatly. "It cannot be remedied now. But I must find the means, and immediately, to get to Villa Hermosa by tomorrow morning."

Alarmed now, Don Teodoro's partner obsequiously recommended the distinguished representative of the North American police to apply to Don Ramón, the most distinguished townsman, and the most responsible, and the leading citizen, and the head of Zapata's first family—in sum, the only man for a major emergency of this sort. Himself and Don Teodoro were too humble for such affairs.

Don Ramón's house was on the river-bank, in a row of plaster store-fronts and houses facing the river, somewhat ampler and more imposing in its proportions than its neighbors. It overlooked the river from the head of a high, muddy bank that supported a few casual trees, the worse for wear. The whole front of the house was one immense room, opening through two high doorways to the river, with shelves and counters displaying the varied stock of a general-store. On the other side was a flowering patio, ac-

cessible by one door and leading, evidently, to the private quarters of the house. The bulk of a huge middle-aged woman in a black dress—black upholstery, one should say—was sunk into the frame of a rocking-chair in the center of the room; she was neither awake nor asleep, neither aware of the world of nature and man about her, nor altogether unaware. She was merely indifferent. Standing, or half-standing, against a counter at one corner of the room, propped up on one elbow, was a shabby fellow in the same condition of apparent anaesthesia.

I paid no attention to them but, walking boldly into the room, shouted out for the four walls to hear: "*Está Don Ramón?*" There was a slight apparent stir in the occupants of the room, but as a boy came in from the patio at that moment they settled back to their somnolence. The boy was seventeen years old (as I later learned), well-built, with an open, candid face that showed a friendly and eager attitude to my wants. Its look said: "What can I do for you?" before I had even suggested there was anything I wanted done.

("I think it wrong," wrote Tristram Shandy, Gent., "merely because a man's hat has been blown off his head by chance the first night he comes to Avignon,—that he should therefore say, 'Avignon is more subject to high winds than any town in all France.'") I take the lesson to heart, as should all travelers and all readers of what travelers write of their travels. Here I have just finished saying as much as that you will not find a single obliging adult in such a town as Zapata, and here, suddenly, is the son of Don Ramón!

Don Ramón was away, at a *finca*, and the son of Don Ramón wished to know if there was any service he could



render me in place of his father, whose absence on such an occasion was most unfortunate. I told him my tale, and he listened so sympathetically that one might have stepped forward and cried on his shoulder—schoolboy that he was. And his sympathy immediately took the form of action—firm, decided, businesslike. On the wall was an old-fashioned telephone-instrument by means of which we must attempt to establish contact with Don Teodoro at Finca Esmeralda, where there was also an instrument. But at that moment—as he lifted the receiver off the hook and turned a crank that jangled a bell—there was a sudden great roaring outside, accompanied by crashing sounds, and the room grew dark. It was as if, by lifting the receiver, atoms had been smashed and the colossal inner forces of nature released. Rain fell, lightning flashed, thunder crashed, and surely the Day of Judgment was finally at hand!

When Judgment Day does come, at last, we can probably expect that all our telephones (and other scientific contraptions) will immediately go out of order. The wires will be too wet, the atmosphere too charged with doom. Don Ramón's son found the instrument dead and had to give up the attempt to communicate with the outside world. We should have to wait, now, till the rain was over and the wires had had a chance to dry out.

"Is there nothing we can do without Don Teodoro?" I asked, suspecting that even if we had got in touch with him it would have been to no purpose, except for the satisfaction of expressing to him an indignation we now felt in common.

It was agreed, upon deliberation, that I should myself dispatch a telegram to the Cia. Aeronautica del Sur, S. A.,

at Villa Hermosa, inquiring the cost of a chartered plane and the list of passengers from Zapata for the regular plane. Why hadn't I thought of that before? The matter was attended to immediately, in spite of the storm, and I returned then to the establishment of Don Ramón to wait out the time till a reply from Villa Hermosa should be forthcoming in conversation with the son of the house.

The son of the house was altogether an admirable person, intelligent, ambitious, and agreeable. His ambition was to become an aviator, and he looked forward to the possibility that in the following January he would travel to New York City to enroll himself in a school of aviation. With this in mind, he was studying, in all his leisure moments, an old English grammar and conversation-book. I wish I had that book with me now. Published in the latter part of the past century, the frontispiece was an engraving of its author posing in beard and frock-coat. But its contents were altogether beyond belief. The language which it taught in the formal terms of grammar and rhetoric was a quaint version of Biblical English. Yea and nay served for yes and no. Sample sentences were of this order: "He hath took the book unto his house. . . ." "Thou art mine own dearest possession. . . ." "He hath salted his judgment with much wit. . . ." I was shocked to find this lone scholar so earnestly studying a language that had gone out of use centuries ago, and promptly began explaining to him the defect of his text. But I saw at once that no good could come of disillusioning him—and it might have been impossible to do so in any case, against the authority of the printed word. Who was I, after all, to argue a case against a man in a beard and frock-coat?

Instead, I determined to help him, and held the book

while he recited conjugations from memory, or prompted him in the translations of the strange sample-conversations. But this was more pitiful still, for he had no idea of how the words he read or recited from memory should be pronounced. Not the remotest! Yet there was deadly scholastic earnest in his determination to master the language, as with forehead set in a frown he forced out the strange balderdash he mistook for English.

I was coming and going a good deal that afternoon, using Don Ramón's house as headquarters: to the telegraph-office to learn if the answer which was not to come had come yet; to the shuttered house that was to remain shuttered to see if it had unshuttered yet; to the hotel, where I unearthed the sole passenger from Zapata on the morrow's plane, a young government clerk traveling on government business of "the greatest urgency," and failed in my attempt to buy his passage. Between times, I returned to help the son of Don Ramón in his studies and to advise him in a paternal manner on his future. We were rapidly becoming friends.

At his house I was first introduced, with great eagerness, to the local "*profesor de inglés*"—the professor of English. It was expected, by Don Ramón's son and some hangers-on who had gathered for the occasion, that the two of us would immediately jabber away at each other in my native tongue. But the "Professor of English," a young man with an athletic figure, had been dragged unwillingly to the encounter and was in a state of furious embarrassment. He had to confess to me publicly that, in fact, he could speak not a word of my language. Never was man more humiliated!

It was he, I think, who first asked me whether I had sent

my telegram "ordinario" or "extra-urgente." Ordinario it was, of course. Now he told me that telegrams sent ordinario were not delivered till the day after their dispatch. So again I rushed to the *oficina de telégrafos* and sent again the same message, paying a few extra centavos to have it go extra-urgente.

But now the afternoon was late, and it was doubtful whether there would be time for the reply to come before the telegraph-office shut its doors for the night. I was utterly at a loss and, not knowing what else to do, went back to the hotel to bathe my aching head in cold water.

On my return to the office, passing through the little central plaza, an urchin ran up to me and handed me the reply from Villa Hermosa: two hundred and twenty-three pesos, sixty centavos, for a special plane, to be ready to make myself voyage tomorrow at the seven hours!

Two hundred and twenty-three pesos meant something above forty-five dollars, and that was well beyond what I could afford. On the other hand, it might cost me a good deal more to default on my passage from Villa Hermosa clear through to New York. I was at the end of my rope, no longer able to come to any decision. What I needed right then, and extra-urgente, was a celestial revelation.

And then an oracle spoke from the crowd, in the shape of the "Professor of English." A group of us were standing on the river-bank before Don Ramón's house (for now that I was a visiting police-official I had become an object of public interest). Below us, a battered schooner, loaded with cattle, was moored to a tree. "Why—" quoth the oracle, "why don't you take yourself passage on that boat to Obregón, at the mouth of the river. It will arrive there by early morning. In Obregón, surely, a plane for Villa

Hermosa leaves tomorrow." I looked at the boat and read the name painted on its prow, "*La Esperanza*," which may be translated as that which springs eternal in the human breast.

Ten minutes later I was aboard, with all my baggage. Twenty minutes later, as night fell, we were chugging down river, Zapata disappearing about a bend behind us—for ever.





## CHAPTER XIX

# H O P E T A K E S S T R A N G E

shapes. In this case it was, perhaps, forty to fifty feet long, deep in the belly and broad in the beam, with cattle stowed in one solid heaving mass from stem to stern, forty bellowing head in all. I never came so near to inferno as that night. There it was, in fact, right below me, where in the foul pit of *La Esperanza* bulls and cows and steers struggled against each other for breathing-space, trampled their fallen brethren into the ordure underfoot, and bellowed in a chorus of terrible anguish against the torture of their damnation. One electric-light bulb, hanging from the rigging overhead, spread its sordid radiance over the heaving mass below.

"Eight pesos," the captain had asked for the trip to Obregón, cheating me outrageously but finding me willing. He was a small-boned dark man, eyes much too close to each other, who acted and talked always with an air of suspicious reserve, as though afraid his authority would be questioned if he showed himself human. He had, I suppose, a right to be afraid (if he was), for his crew of cattle-

maulers was as toughened and grimy and sinister a gang of human oddments as you could find on any waterfront anywhere—and a really tough Mexican, I think, hasn't his peer the world over. But they were as human as children, and the captain, who was neat and clean, maintained his authority over them by the withdrawn severity of his manner. He gave his orders in a tight little voice and then withdrew, as if not to provoke them. And they were not provoked.

"Will there be any place to hang my hammock?" I had asked him before accepting passage, for I had a great need to lie down.

"How not?" he had answered, and looked away.

Once aboard, it was immediately evident that there was no place for a hammock. The boat was almost entirely open over the inferno below; what little space there was on the roof of the deck-house, in the stern by the tiller, and among the coils of rope in the prow, was occupied by the crew. And once you had a seat, if you left it for a moment you lost it to some exceptionally able-bodied seaman who had just been waiting for you to get up.

A few minutes after embarking, a man made the rounds, scrambling along the gunwales, with a huge iron pot full of rice and tortillas. Each of us in turn dipped into the pot and extracted a mess of the rice, wrapped it in the soggy tortillas, and devoured it. Coffee—hot, black, rich, steaming—came next. It was an excellent and satisfying meal; for it is true in Mexico, as in France, that the native food is nowhere bad—though in Mexico you may taste a meal for a week afterwards.

Next I procured a hatch-cover, a bit less than me in length and just wide enough to lie on, and laid it like a

bridge across one corner of the open hatchway for a bed. That done, I swathed myself like a mummy in my poncho and stretched out on it.

A narrow bridge across the chasm of an inferno is not the proverbial bed of roses. Not exactly! The cattle directly under me were tied up short by the horns, in two solid rows, back to back. They were packed in so tightly that, should one have jerked the skin on its flank, it would probably have been felt all down the line. One beast had, evidently, already expired. She hung by her horns, head stretched up off the floor, neck twisted, mouth drooling, body prone, and was trampled by her neighbors without showing any sign of response. Another was expiring. In the same position of helplessness underneath the mass, at intervals of every few minutes she would struggle violently, feet in air, and split the night with the anguish of her bellows. Then she would subside, and for the rest of the time, till the next spasm, regularly emit the horrid, quivering groans of the dying. Two others had managed to change places and their necks were crossed so that they gored each other with their horns, for they were still tied to their original stations. From moment to moment they plunged frantically against each other, to no avail, and so gradually grew weaker. At times the whole mass, from end to end of the boat, would rebel with one accord, all struggling, heaving, bellowing together for perhaps a minute before they subsided to the endurance of their agony.

When matters got too bad below, or were not bad enough, a soot-blackened man, like an assistant devil, would clamber down into the hold and, walking precariously over the backs of the beasts, increase their torture by jabbing them with a spear.



But this was no bed of roses in a more particular sense. From directly below there steamed up a poisonous hot vapor that nauseated me. I was too close to inferno to be without a gas-mask; so finally I abandoned my bed and sat up against the tiller, wrapped in my poncho, to wait the night out in company with the crew.

It was, in any case, too beautiful, too peaceful a night for sleep. A moon was up, riding high, silvering the surface of the river, the foliage of the distant banks, and the long expanse of the sky itself, in which a scattering of stars still managed to show themselves. This river-road of ours was broad, straight, and majestic, murmuring on all sides as we ran through its surface, our engine throbbing regularly in muffled strokes like some ultimate cosmic timepiece. We were moving through an unknown lyric world, fellow men under providence, trusting in the tenderness of nature, the beneficence of life existing in one piece with such a vast and perfect setting. The breeze that flowed caressingly from ahead held a delicious tropical fragrance and balminess, with just a spice of nocturnal chill. But the roars and groans of the fallen, that had been cut off from this native loveliness, still rose from below.

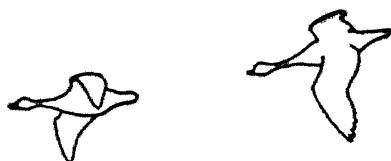
Some of the men had curled up in odd places, like mice, and were sleeping with their heads tucked into their knees, waking from time to time to look about them, to contribute a few words to a neighboring conversation, and to stretch before returning to sleep. Others just sat and murmured together in little groups. I had fallen into casual conversation with my neighbor, a hard man of middle age, and we found enough in common to consume several hours in talk. Some fifteen years ago, it transpired, he had been to the Petén, to Flores, working there as a *chiclero*, and

he was glad to hear of the region from a traveler who had just come from there. We went on with alternate accounts of where we had been, what we had seen, what we had done, what we should someday do—and so shortened the hours of the night.

Once in the night we stopped at the landing of a sugar-hacienda on the right bank to take on the *hacendado*. There we were for over half an hour, during which there was great quiet coming and going on shore by the light of bobbing lanterns. The *hacendado* had forgotten this, so had to send back to the house, then go back himself; then the fond farewells to be said, breast to breast, head to shoulder, with affectionate back-slapping. Again, something else forgotten, or a message to be left for someone, or someone who should have been at the landing for the farewell missing, or instructions to be given—and the *hacendado*, who had already stepped onto the boat and off half a dozen times, had to go back again. But it made no difference. No one was in a hurry. Whenever the time came when there would no longer be any excuse not to proceed, we would proceed—let it come when it might!

Again, in the early hours of the morning, we stopped at another landing to have our papers and cargo scrutinized by the agent of a labor-union. This consumed just two hours, for there was some sort of argument to be gone through about the sheaf of typewritten sheets that the agent and a group of the boatmen were examining in the beam of a little flashlight. I daresay the ink wasn't the right color. Then—something was missing, said the agent. But, *hombre*, look, here it is, see, on this page! No, no, no, answered the agent, it's not proper at all! But look here! *mire hombre!*—this is all in order: notice for example

where it says here . . . No, no, no—this is missing! But here, on this page, *por ejemplo*, it says . . . And so on endlessly. The agent wanted to hold up the boat. No one really minded whether he did or not. It was a tiresome business. The men argued with the agent in relays, some going off for cat-naps between times. In two hours, by this process, the bureaucrat was worn down and let us pass.



The sky grew paler and began to light up from the east. In the gray dawn, the man who had been to Flores stripped and bathed, repeatedly dropping a bucket overboard into the passing water at the end of a rope, hauling it in, and upsetting it over his head. The agony of the cattle continued unabated, though the dying cow had managed to regain her feet. She was the heroine of the new day. By now we were almost in the tidewater reaches of the Usumacinta. The river was broad, shining over irregular areas like a mirror, the land on either side endlessly flat, with thatched ranchitos, little groves of coconut palms and fruit-trees, and isolated steel windmills along its banks. There were cattle about the ranches, and people just beginning to stir. Another day! A bit of tentative piping and whistling from the groves along shore, then a steady chorus of bird-calls. Another day, another day! A gang of some twenty black cormorants were still at roost in the stark branches of a dead tree overhanging the water, silhouetted grotesquely against the dim sky; but they were deciding to take off as we came past. Two or three at a time, they stretched out

their snaky necks, lowered their heads, and fell from the tree like wing-clipped birds, beating the air futilely, but gained control at the water-level and sped away over the surface in direct flight. The sun rose, then, baking everything under its rays after the chilling night. It was daylight and hot all at once. Two Muscovy ducks beat across the river close ahead of us, flying swiftly with the momentum of their size and weight, circled inland, were uncertain for a moment, and finally put down behind a grove of trees. Here and there, groups of yellow-headed parrots clattered noisily along the banks, alighting in the groves or taking off from them. A jabiru stork, like a narrow, gnarled cross feathered in black and gleaming white, flew majestically across the river, all alone, and once across began floating in circles high over the land. More Muscovy ducks, always in pairs, crossing the river to put down into marshes back from the shore. It was full day now. Native boys poled their dugouts close in along the banks. The normal activity of life had been resumed; the world, refreshed, continued on its endless way. But none of us gave it any recognition except the man from Flores, who bathed at dawn. We continued throbbing on our course down the river, toward the Gulf of Mexico and the port of Álvaro Obregón.

By six in the morning (I had been told the previous evening) we would be in Obregón—surely no later, *hombre!* I took this for what it was worth and estimated, correctly, that we should be in about ten. I didn't care. I had taken passage on the *Esperanza* because I wanted to get on, to get away from Zapata, to get out of the interior altogether, down to the open sea. To be on the Gulf of Mexico, at last, seemed an end in itself.

The landscape was all marsh now, uniform as far as it could be scanned, with the river making a broad, straight, shining road across it. The hours passed and there was little change, except that the day grew hotter and it became necessary to seek out shady patches on the boat. The river branched once, a piece of it making straight off to the left like a canal through the marsh. Another fork; then a bend. The men had been telling me for two hours that we were already all but there—seguro, Señor! As we came round the bend, at last I knew, by a sign, that we were in fact almost there. Waiting for us overhead, as if she had come in advance to meet us, a great black-and-white sea-fowl with a long spike of a tail swung about on crooked wings. Now that we were here, she paid no attention to us after all. She circled slow and wide over the river, enormously indifferent to the greatness of human purpose. Mistress of her element, the female man-o'-war bird regarded us not as we passed below with our cargo of bellowing cattle. But to me her presence signified arrival; this was as good as a sight of the sea itself. And sure enough, about the next bend the river opened out, at the end of a long reach, on the wide ocean! Puerto Álvaro Obregón was a huddle of houses and boats on the right bank. It was ten o'clock in the morning, there was the suggestion of a sea-breeze, all was well.



The agent for the *Compañía Aeronautica del Sur* reported no airplane from Obregón to Villa Hermosa that day. But the cost of chartering a plane was only ninety-five pesos—about twenty dollars, or well under half of what it cost from Zapata. “Bueno!” said I, and the plane was chartered—to be at the airfield at two o’clock. Out of the crowd that had gathered to observe this transaction (for all such matters are public in Central America, where a foreigner is a sort of free theatrical spectacle) a mestizo boy in a black-felt hat now stepped up to beg that I would be so good as to sell him one passage in my plane. Bueno again—I would be so good! Later I sold a second passage, thereby bringing the cost to me down to about twelve dollars. I left word at the agency that I would be accessible until one o’clock at the local hotel for anyone who wanted passage to Villa Hermosa that day, then set off in quest of the unforgotten beer, which now at last I found.

I was most businesslike that day, and got things done! For there is a different atmosphere in Puerto Alvaro Obregón. It is, after all, a seaport, a trading-station in the economy of the world, a point of transfer on the worldwide network of the highways of commerce—not just the center of a cattle-district. The world is out there, across the ocean, and the world infects this port with iron ships carrying exotic produce, with sailormen of strange lands, with rumors of a multifarious and adventurous existence to which, in a limited capacity, it still proudly belongs. New York, London, Marseilles, Bombay, Capetown, Batavia, San Francisco, and little Álvaro Obregón all squat in one circle together, transacting the business of the world—while Zapata is just another village where cattle-herders and their women go to market.

Certainly Obregón is not impressive in itself—hardly more so than Zapata or Tenosique. It is, outwardly, but one more dirty village clogged with scabby dogs, nearsighted snuffling pigs, and human drift. But it is worn in the cap of commerce, blazoned in the great maritime peerage that rules the world we live in. It is informed: small as it is, it has high connections. In a very real sense, this village is more worldly than Guatemala City or Athens, Tennessee.

So the citizens of Álvaro Obregón, different from those of Zapata, are familiar with negotiations, with large transactions and the methods of carrying them through. If you want clearance for a vessel, or a bottle of beer, or special transport, they can produce tariffs and forms and contracts. It is all routine, the business of every day, the reason and the main concern of their existence. The agent of a transportation company will not flee back into the hills merely because you made a request for transportation. When you ask him to arrange for the chartering of a special plane he knows just what to do: he reaches into the next to the bottom drawer below the counter and pulls out yellow Form No. 8 (not transferable) for you to fill in and thereunto affix your signature. He keeps a carbon for himself (blue) and another for Villa Hermosa (green). And at the appointed hour, or near it, the plane will be there for you, without your having done anything further than to lay out your pesos on the counter. It is all a part of something impersonal and vast, one more item to check off in the transaction of the business of the world.

If you take passage with Pan American Airways, Inc., you will be charged extra for transportation to and from the airport. My service is, in this respect, more generous. There are automobiles in Obregón, and at least one taxi,

which I hired for myself and my passengers, José Carrillo S. and Manuel Herrera H. José Carrillo, the boy who had first approached me in the office of the agent, was anxious to get to Villa Hermosa because he had just received word that his sister there was ill. Manuel Herrera, a squat mestizo laborer dressed for the occasion in sober black, like a clerk, was in the employ of the government—as, it seems, is every third Mexican you meet. The government was summoning him to Villa Hermosa.

I had ample time to get acquainted with my passengers, for the taxi was ready at the hotel by a quarter past one and before half-past we were, all three of us, seated in the grandstand of the airport, which was nothing more than a soccer-field at the edge of town. It was surrounded by thatched adobe huts. At half-past two, a battered little cabin-monoplane roared out of the sky and squashed down on the field, bouncing to the end before it stopped. Out of it climbed a lanky Mexican in a white yachting cap, a white shirt that was open all the way down the front and spread at the collar to expose chest and shoulders, and a black necktie knotted about his bare throat. (Neckties were evidently required by regulation.) He examined Form No. 8 perfunctorily, cast an eye on our baggage, then on ourselves, shook hands, and motioned us to climb in. “*Vámonos, Señores!*”

The plane skipped down the length of the field and blew away, as it had come, like a handkerchief in the wind. It was a battered rattletrap, an ancient flying flivver that shook and banged about and bounced in the air as if it would go to pieces on the instant. But it flew. Now the whole world of coastal Tabasco fell away below to a gray-blue map, Obregón there, at the mouth of the river, the



wide plain of the ocean beyond losing itself in distant haze, and inshore a flooded landscape of gleaming lakes and rivers, an intricate network of waterways through endless marshes. The sea and the land interpenetrated everywhere, so that there was no hard and fixed coastline, or never quite. One of those innumerable wending rivers below was the Grijalva (up which Don Juan de Grijalva had sailed for gold and glory in 1518, the year before Cortés embarked on the conquest of Mexico), and on its shore stood the capital of Tabasco, a way-station on the Pan American Airways routes, the city of Villa Hermosa.

Was there ever, in modern times, such a city, so wild and so lawless, so disorderly and ungoverned? This grown-up waif of civilization, this hussy without breeding or virtue of any sort, this city of Villa Hermosa, as it exists in the 20th century, is more like the Paris of François Villon, I should think, than like your typically modern cities, in which that symbol of modernity, the policeman, stands at every street-corner. I don't remember any policemen in Villa Hermosa, and if there had been any I should not have wanted to vouch for his survival. This is the old-time Wild Mexico. Here are your Mexican bandits—or such they appear to be. They wear wide-brimmed, decorated sombreros, have heavy rounded shoulders, and their paunches are constrained by sagging cartridge-belts. The revolvers they display openly on their hips, like jewelry, mostly have long barrels and may have handles of pearl or chased silver. These are the gentlemen, *los caballeros*, of Villa Hermosa. Among the riffraff of the streets, that carry no armaments, there are plenty of wild men. One tall sallow Mexican, in

an immense sombrero, sauntered drunkenly up and down the street outside my hotel looking for a fight. The street was crowded with onlookers, but the drunken challenger remained always in the center of an open circle that moved with him. Occasionally he would make a surprise dash at the onlookers, who promptly fell over each other pell-mell in flight, and on one such occasion he captured a trophy in the form of one little man's straw sombrero. What happened next was as memorable as anything I saw that summer. The tall ruffian, in the midst of the wide circle of onlookers, proceeded to eat that straw hat. He set his teeth in the brim, tore away a mouthful, chewed it to a pulp, and spat it out—then took another bite. When he was done there was nothing left but scraps of pulpy straw littering the street. The little man grinned sheepishly all the while, from a safe distance, and in response to the taunts of his companions pretended that he didn't care about the hat anyway. Poo—it was nothing!

Tom later told me that, during the three days he spent in Villa Hermosa, he was witness to just three killings.

I say there were elements in the character of Villa Hermosa to remind one of the stories of Paris in the time of François Villon. There was even a vagabond-poet true to type. In black sombrero and heavy beard, he lounged against a wall at a street-corner, a semi-circle of attentive spectators before him, and chanted ballads to the accompaniment of a guitar strung about his neck. His fingers strummed the guitar monotonously, limiting themselves to three or four standard chords, while his voice rose and fell, not in actual song, but in some standard wailing intonation of balladry. He had a boy who functioned as his assistant, selling printed

sheets of the ballads that were sung for a few centavos apiece.

I give herewith a sample of his art, which, I hold, might in part have been composed by the man who, five hundred years ago, sang "*Où sont les neiges d'antan?*"

*Patria, patria Mexicana  
Me duele hasta el corazón  
Tantos millones de pesos  
Que ha perdido la Nación.*

Oh land, oh land of Mexico  
It wounds me to the heart  
So many millions of pesos  
With which the nation has had to part.

*Me da tristeza de verte  
En tan pobre situación,  
Tus hijos a quien se quejan  
Que sufren sin compasión.*

It makes me sad to see thee  
In such a poor situation,  
Thy sons, to whom much lament,  
That suffer without compassion.

*Viva don Panchito Villa  
Hombre de mucho valor  
Por mi Patria dio la vida  
Combatiendo con honor.*

Long live Don Panchito Villa  
That man whose worth was high  
For my country he gave his life  
Fighting with honor to die.

*Patria, patria Mexicana,  
Me dan ganas de llorar,  
Que a Villa en una emboscada  
Lo vinieron a matar.*

Oh land, oh land of Mexico,  
It makes me want to cry,  
That to Villa in an ambushade  
Came murder on the sly.

*Si viviera ese gran hombre  
Otro gallo nos cantará,  
Más grande fuera tu nombre,  
República Mexicana.*

If this great man still lived,  
Another rooster would sing-o,  
Greater would be thy name then,  
Republic of Mexico.

*Madre mía Guadalupe,  
Remedia esta situación  
Por tanta criatura humana  
Que sufren sin compasión.*

My mother of Guadalupe,  
Remedy such a situation,  
For so many human creatures  
That suffer without compassion.

I have not bothered to give more than a perfunctory translation, for no translation into English could capture the wailing sorrow of the original. The ballad goes on, then, to cry for the other lost heroes of Mexican history.

The specific plaint of the song, the "*desgracia*" to which

it alludes, the "*tantos millones de pesos que ha perdido la Nación*," refers, of course, to the earnings of foreign capital.

Most of the ballads are, like this one, patriotic, and the peculiar note of sadness they sound may be taken as the keynote of Mexican nationalism. Mexico feels sorry for herself, she is utterly steeped in the luxury of self-pity, no nation more so. Wherever you go you find the Mexican people reveling almost voluptuously in it. Their newspapers are full of it, their conversation is interrupted by its sighs. *Patria, patria Mexicana, me duele hasta el corazón . . .* Even the formal diplomatic notes which the Foreign Minister, Señor Eduardo Hay, sent to Washington at the time of the oil-land expropriations, sounded the undertone of self-pity as a sentimental justification for the acts in question! The Mexicans feel we don't understand them and are, I think, a bit shocked at our putting law above sentiment. They look on their country as a proud helpless beauty at the mercy of wicked foreign ravishers. Contrast this image with the French "Marianne," who is generally represented as the militant mother of her brood, sorrowing in misfortune, not on her own account, but for the loss of her sons. The personalized symbol of Mexico, on the other hand, represents the despoiled land itself, the natural resources of the Mexican soil. Where in France the mother mourns for her children, in Mexico it is the children that mourn for their mother. *Patria, patria Mexicana, me dan ganas de llorar. . . .*

Another ballad dealt specifically with the expropriations and was, in fact, entitled "*Corrido de las Empresas Petroleras*"—"The Ballad of the Oil Companies." It begins:

Escuchen este Corrido  
Que yo les voy a cantar,  
Es una noticia leve  
Pero muy sensacional.

Listen to this ballad  
That I'm going to sing to you,  
It is an unimportant notice  
But very sensational.

Desde el primero de Marzo  
Que se estaba discutiendo  
La clausura del Trabajo  
Sobre el caso del petroleo.

Since the first of March  
They had been discussing  
The closing of all work  
In connection with the oil-case.

El diez y siete de Marzo,  
Esto si que fue de veras,  
Clausuraron sus trabajos  
Las compañías petroleras.

On the seventeenth of March,  
At last it became true,  
The works at last were closed  
By the petroleum companies.

Año de mil novecientos  
Treinta y ocho muy presente,  
Fue clausurado el petroleo;  
Viva nuestro Presidente!

In the year nineteen thirty-eight,  
The year at present with us,  
The petroleum works were closed;  
Long life to our President!

This ballad is interesting as a curiosity, but it lacks the literary merit, the feeling of a genuine sorrow, that distinguishes the other. It is mere journalism, performing the function of a newspaper-article for a population of which a substantial part is illiterate.

Other ballads dealt with less important items of news. Take, for instance, the "*Corrido de Rosita*." In the late year of nineteen thirty-five Rosita Alvarez died. Her *mamá* had said to her: Rosa, don't go out tonight. *Mamá* (Rosa had answered), it is not my fault that I like dances. Hipólito arrived at the hall, looking for someone to dance with. As she was the most attractive, Rosita scorned him. Rosa (he said), don't scorn me, for it will cost you dear. Despite your saying what you say (she answered), I don't want to dance with you. He put his hand to his belt, and from it pulled out his pistol, and fired thrice at poor Rosita. . . .

The ballad ends with poor Rosita in the sky, rendering her account to the Creator, while Hipólito renders his own account in jail.



A fierce election-campaign for governor of the state was being waged in Tabasco. Walls were boldly placarded with proclamations, *noticias*, *advertencias*, *propaganda*—banners overhung streets emblazoning the names and attributes of the respective candidates. There were three of these—each one seeking the governorship on the strength of being more revolutionary than the other two. One of them was a Turk, the great uncle of the son of Don Ramón of Zapata; one was a cousin of the president.

"Who will win?" I would ask wherever I went, taking a sporting interest in the race. "It has not been decided yet, Señor." "And when will it be decided?" "In all probability not until a week or two before the election takes place—then *El Presidente* will indicate his choice, but not sooner." "And whom the president chooses will be governor?" "Sí, Señor, seguro!" "But why any election at all, then?" Here the interlocutor would shrug his shoulders and make some answer to the effect that I must understand that in his country they did not have the same kind of democracy that we practiced in our much richer and more powerful nation of North America. "Our *patria Mexicana* has always been so unhappy, so miserable, so sunk in *desgracia*!"

That night in Villa Hermosa democratic rockets were shooting up over the city and exploding in every direction. Across the street from the Gran Hotel Palacio was the Gran Hotel Galatea. At intervals of five minutes or so, a ragged,

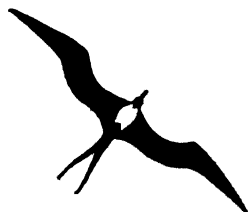
middle-aged mestizo would appear in a window of the Galatea directly opposite my window in the Palacio, a rocket in one hand, a match in the other. With expressionless face, in the most perfunctory manner, he would touch match to rocket, which would forthwith hiss into the sky, explode, and fall. Usually he did not bother to watch its flight. And all over the city, from other windows, others were doing the same. It was a grand election-contest!

But I was dying. All afternoon since my arrival I had been arguing with the white-haired and gentlemanly agent of the Banco de México, trying to persuade him to cash my letter-of-credit, which he was legally obligated to do, so that I could pay for my airplane-passage in dollars, as the Compañía Mexicana de Aviación required. He did not know, he was not sure, but he thought possibly the Ministry of the Interior had recently issued an order forbidding transactions in foreign-exchange to bank-agents. He had some sort of impression of having heard of some order of the sort having been given. "But it makes no difference," I had argued. "No importa. My letter-of-credit is in dollars, I ask you for payment in dollars, and since there is no question of pesos at all in this transaction there is no question of foreign-exchange." He thought possibly I was right, but still it looked too much like foreign-exchange to him to be worth the risk; just possibly he would be breaking a law that just possibly might exist. So I could not get dollars, and because I could not get dollars I could not pay for my passage, and because I could not pay for my passage it seemed likely that I would rot away the rest of my life in Villa Hermosa. For hours I argued with the old gentleman, getting hot under the collar and working my financial Spanish to the point of exhaustion. At the end of three hours he agreed to

cash the letter-of-credit (which was in dollars on a New York bank) in pesos, at a substantial discount, and then convert the pesos into dollars again at another great discount. This was an utterly nonsensical transaction, and, what is more, a double transaction in foreign-exchange, but it was my only way out and by that time I was on the verge of collapse, more dead than alive, with a respectable fever and a devil inside my head who was trying to break out with a sledge-hammer.

But the payment was made, life went on, the night passed, the sun rose, morning came. At the airport a great gang of men was awaiting the arrival of an important *político* on the plane from Mérida. A plane came in, a passenger got out, and the gang, waiting behind the barrier, cheered lustily, broke into song, and unfurled a huge red banner at a pre-arranged signal. The leader of the gang began a grandiloquent speech of welcome as the passenger, appearing utterly bewildered and frightened, approached. Then someone stopped the orator. This was not the *político* after all.

Half-an-hour afterwards I was in the plane for Mérida—two days later, astonishingly enough, in New York.







## CHAPTER XX

**I**F TOM AND I HAD UNDERTAKEN our expedition in Central America as professional archaeologists seeking certain specific data—measurements of buildings, location of ruins, design and arrangement of monuments—the reader would now be entitled to a list of our findings, a catalogue of the facts we had managed to add to the store already accumulated by science. As simple amateurs, however, we were free to concentrate on a larger objective. Our purpose, the justification of our pains, was self-knowledge: we were engaged in the everlasting effort of man to understand the spirit and destiny of his own species on earth, examining the remains of what it had once accomplished with this in view. For the Mayas were men like us; their civilization was human, like ours. If we can attain a knowledge of our own specific natures only by studying the great range of human nature displayed in our fellow men, it is equally true that we can understand our own civilization only by reference to other civilizations that have gone before.

From the river of ruins to the city of New York is a quick

jump now by airplane. But from a civilization dead a thousand years to our own ailing present is, nevertheless, an incalculable jump in time. It presents extraordinary possibilities to the mind. For one might, by identifying the history of our own civilization with that of its predecessor, look upon it as a return to our present from a journey into our own future. Do these ruins, encompassed by an almost impenetrable vegetation, represent the conclusion of all human civilizations, the grinning skull of our common mortality? Must we reconcile ourselves to this as our predestined end?

The world of the 20th century finds itself increasingly concerned with the question of why such established civilizations as this ever fall. The great Middle American civilization was doing very well, it appears, when something happened and it succumbed. Again, Rome flourished, something happened, Rome fell. We ourselves have prospered on a scale beyond that of any of our predecessors. And now, what is happening to us? . . . What idiotic statesman commits the fatal blunder in each case, what diabolic villain strikes the fatal blow, what incompetent soldier leaves open the gate? Who is the man, what is the deed? . . .

Perhaps the mistake we make, in even asking such questions, is to regard a civilization as something constructed and maintained mechanically, an instrument without life or soul of its own, an intricate machine, merely, to be worked by pulling the proper levers and switches. We have come to think of this ancient and faltering civilization of our own exclusively in terms of technique: economic relationships, centralization of responsibility, division of functions, production and distribution. . . . So, when we do not prosper,

it is natural for us to ask what wrong lever was pulled, who threw the wrong switch.

But great civilizations have all arisen, in the first instance, not as conveniences but as expressions of the soul of a people, as the outward embodiments of men's spiritual aspirations. If our civilization today is a mere machine for feeding, clothing, and housing us, its attendants mere technicians, it was not always so. The men who founded it, like those who founded the Mayan, were men who had been granted a revelation, men who were powerfully moved by a vocation to build as they did. Creatures with the bodies of animals, exposed to an omnipotent nature that was no respecter of species, these men yet discovered within themselves the presence of an immortal soul that lifted them above the animal kingdom. They saw the vision of a possible perfection; they conceived of divinity and recognized their own kinship to it. The aspiration toward godhead, the irresistible urgency to realize and express the inner nobility of which they had become aware, moved them to transcend their animal selves by building a civilization worthy of their newly found dignity. Like the early Greeks who kept their eyes fixed on the heights of Olympus, the men of the pristine Middle Ages strove to emulate the living God who had, according to their tradition, sacrificed Himself upon the cross to redeem them from the toils of original sin. Because men discovered that they had souls, they became builders. They strove to be relieved of their animal past, the evil that they knew as original sin. The Gothic cathedrals, the Homeric epics, the temples of Tikal, are the expressions of the new-born soul striving to rise above the body and free itself.

These early expressions of civilization came from men

who were humble and frightened, aware of their own helplessness before the clashing forces of the universe around them. Nature was very large, in those early days, and man very small. It has been said, however, that the whole of life is but a process of dying, and perhaps it is also true in the history of civilizations. The original incentive, the great surge of spirituality, is consumed in its own expression. The God-fearing man builds the temple to his deity, as an offering, and then is so pleased with his work and so encouraged by his success that he adopts it as a citadel for his own abode. Versailles and Palenque arise as successors to Amiens and Tikal.

After the Gothic man, in each of these civilizations, comes the man of the Renaissance, the prophet of humanism, the conquistador. The Gothic man, humbling himself, fearing nature and nature's god, obsessed by the thought of death, had striven for the immortality of his soul. The man of the Renaissance, master of all he surveys and obsessed by his own surging life, has almost forgotten that men die. His kingdom is of this earth, his wealth is here and now. Less concerned with the expression of spirituality, he strives now to display his own worldly greatness. As an artist he becomes conscious of his own individuality, his technical mastery and his esthetic sensibility. As a statesman he becomes contentious. Personal fame is important. The Gothic techniques of construction had been evolved in response to the compelling needs of the spirit. But in the Renaissance technique increasingly becomes an end in itself. The spiritual unity that had given all men a common aim, based on their common aspiration, breaks down; individuals and states begin to glory in their own power, their own beauty, their own technical proficiency. The universal religion on

which the brotherhood of man was founded becomes a conglomeration of separate creeds differing on technical points. Nations arise from the common body of the civilization to rival each other in power and glory. Men who had once been appalled and frightened by the world of nature, who had humbled themselves and made sacrifices before it, now regard themselves as its masters and see no limits to what their mastery may achieve. Nature remains only to be plundered. For man has at last become the conqueror, and he sends his ships abroad upon the sea to find new fields for conquest. The aspiration to godhead has been realized, the kingdom of heaven is here on earth.

Civilizations are not constructed, they grow. They are like organisms, they seem to be subject to all the laws of organic growth and decay. Once the fresh life-force has expended itself in growth, once all the possibilities that were inherent in the seed have been realized, decay sets in. When men, having achieved the spiritual expression for which they struggled, no longer reach upward, they begin to sink back toward their origins. They become impatient of self-discipline and sacrifice. They forget the menace of a nature that continues to exist beyond the walls of their civilization, the omnipresence of death, and in their greed they neglect the duties imposed by their original vocation. At last they come to think only in terms of their rights as lords of creation. It is not just, in their eyes, that the masters of nature should go hungry, that they should be exposed to heat and cold, that they should suffer any abridgment of their pleasures and comforts. The secularization of a civilization, which marks the attainment of its growth, is invariably followed by an abandonment of all but material considerations. The "standard of living" is all that counts.

In the age of materialism that precedes the downfall of every civilization all the traditional ethical and spiritual considerations are scrapped so that men may compete ruthlessly for the goods of the earth. Philosophers, scientists, artists, poets, turn to nihilism, they deny the teachings of religion, they deny man a soul, they deny him all but his biological and economic needs; destroying the very foundation of civilization, they insist that man be regarded as merely an animal. By proclaiming their disillusionment they free themselves to live their lives as they like, by opening the door of cynicism they release the dogs of unbridled competition. Man becomes an economic animal controlled by greed.

The humble man who lived in the forests, feeling his own helplessness, exposed to the gigantic and inhuman power of nature displayed all about him, the man who first recognized that he had a soul, was in no position to deny his fate. He thought in terms of doom. But the man who lives in a great city, sheltered above and below and on all sides from the elements, the man who governs the temperature of the air that surrounds him, buys his food with paper money over a counter, relies on the police to protect him and on the government to feed him if necessary, that man has lost his knowledge of the real world in which he lives and which his primitive ancestor knew so well. He is as insulated from reality as if he had been born into an incubator and was passing his life in it for safety's sake. Nature has no place in his scheme of things. God need not be invoked when the solution to all problems rests in legislative action. Such a man, zealous in the protection of what he calls his rights, no longer knows the terms upon which his species inhabits this earth.

I daresay these are the signs of a civilization that is in its last throes. The soul is dead; the spiritual aspiration has found its expression, but has not survived it. And man, using the technique he has gained in the process to insulate himself against the fearful reality of the outer world, has lost even his knowledge of that reality. He lives in his citadel now, forgetful of the enemy, concerned only with his artificial domestic economy. For generations he has posted no sentinels beyond the walls.

When men conceive of themselves as soulless animals once more, yet have lost their knowledge of any limitations imposed from without on the free satisfaction of their appetites, chaos follows. The mediaeval unity was a unity of spirit and purpose, self-imposed and forged in the struggle of inspired men to lift themselves above the world of nature. Even in their warfare men agreed to certain rules in keeping with their dignity as creatures transfigured by the possession of souls. But where considerations of honor, faith, or charity no longer limit men in their behavior, unity must be forced on them from above. For lack of a better arrangement, the almighty state arises to enslave men, rules are imposed by the strong on the weak; individualism, no longer founded on the dignity of the individual and bound by accepted rules, is condemned to perish by the sword. The human being who no longer conceives of himself in the image of his god, who has lost sight of the perfection he had set as his goal, is no longer worthy of freedom, nor capable of supporting the responsibility. The almighty state then attempts to plan society by the use of force, as one might attempt to give a dead body the semblance of life by moving its limbs in the motions that had once been spontaneous, free, and voluntary. Supreme force, at last, is

all that remains to uphold the lifeless structure of civilization, and even that is turned inward in the scramble to loot what remains. The Roman legions could not preserve by the mere force of their arms the integrity of the empire they commanded. The great military empire of Mexico, which inherited the civilization of the Mayas, collapsed in ruins with the landing of a little force of Spaniards on its shores, even before a blow had been struck. The Inca empire, under a military dictatorship, disintegrated and vanished like dust in the wind upon the capture of its chief by a band of European adventurers.

Something happened indeed to bring about the fall of these vast civilizations. What happened was simply that men lost the struggle to possess their souls. The wilderness, waiting eternally on the outskirts of human achievement, returned to triumph over human failure.

The whole area of the Petén was once a prosperous land of farms and cities, supporting a population denser than the present population of the state of New York. Here, for a time, men lived like gods. Today the primeval forest, uninhabitable except along its edges and almost impenetrable in large parts, covers it as it had through ages past. Only the stone ruins that lie scattered and broken over its surface remain to speak of man's passing victory here.

Ultimately, it is the individual who creates a civilization, and it is the individual who must save a civilization if it is to be saved at all. The seed germinates and the plant grows in each one of us by our own inner light. Men must look inward for their own greatness, not outward upon the booty that may be had from this earth. For, whatever eclipses the soul may suffer in the degenerate phases of human history,



it is nevertheless immortal. It is still there, and it needs no straining of faith to find it. The remains of what men have wrought, the visions they have sometimes realized in their art, in their statecraft, in their own personal relations, all proclaim that man has a spiritual nature which distinguishes him from the beasts. Our own individual aspirations proclaim it. Economic men, pursuing material ends, motivated solely by greed, did not raise the temples of Tikal, nor compose the symphonies of Beethoven, nor achieve in their personal lives the occasional approximation to that ideal life which they envisioned as a possible perfection. We, as individuals, are essentially no different from the men who created civilization. It is simply that we have lost touch with the reality of the outer world in which we live and of the inner life that gives us our distinction.

We may be sure that no technical adroitness, no mechanical makeshift, will save our disordered civilization from the ruin that overtook its predecessors. Only by rediscovering in ourselves as individuals the essential dignity of man shall we find the key to our salvation and once more establish our unique greatness in the world of nature.





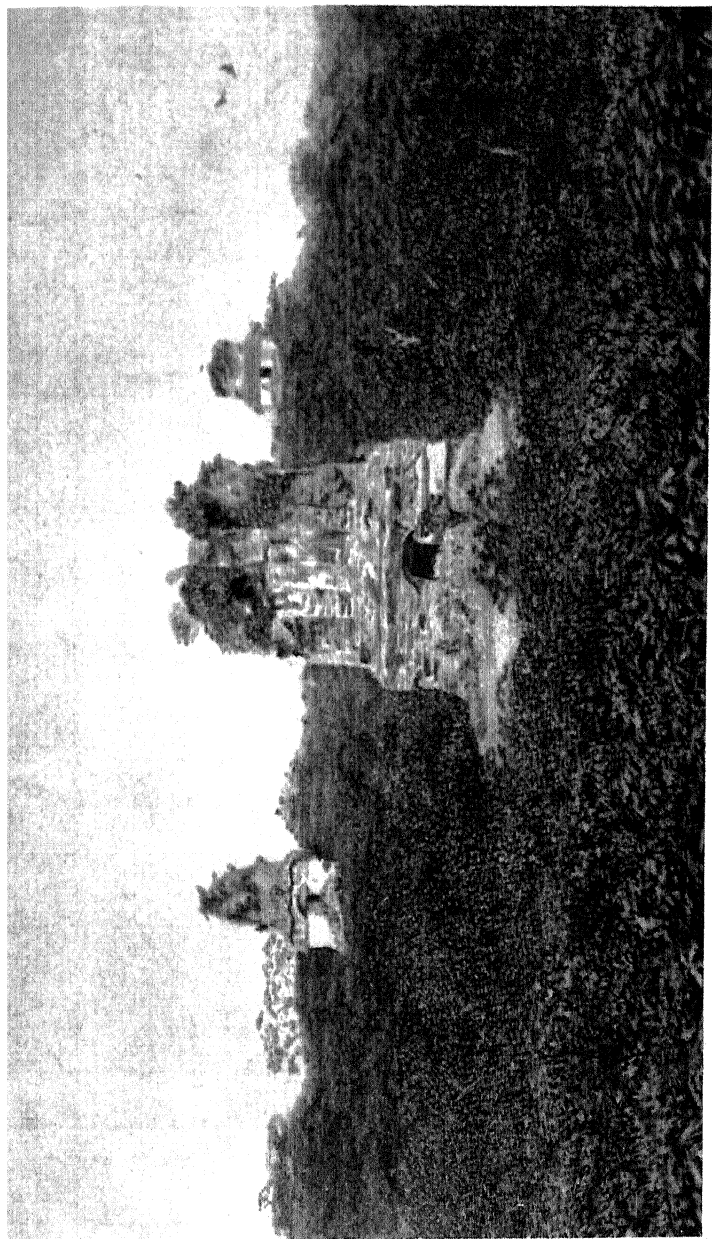
# GUIDE TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF PLACE-NAMES

AGUA AZUL . . . . .	Ah'-wah Ah-zool'
AGUAS CALIENTES . . . . .	Ah'-wahs Kal-yen'-tays
ALTAR DE SACRIFICIOS . . . . .	Al-tar' day Sac-ree-fee'-see-ohs
ANAITÉ . . . . .	Ah-nah-ee-tay'
BELIZE . . . . .	Bell-eetz' (or) Bay-lees'-ay
CAMPECHE . . . . .	Kam-pay'-chay
CHAKANTÚN . . . . .	Chah-kahn-toon'
CHIAPAS . . . . .	Chce-ah'-pahs
CHICHÉN ITZÁ . . . . .	Chce-chen' Ect-sah'
COBÁN . . . . .	Koh-bahn'
COPÁN . . . . .	Koh-pahn'
EL DESEMPEÑO . . . . .	El Days-aym-payn'-yoh
EL ZAPOTE . . . . .	El Sah-poh'-tay
FLORES . . . . .	Flaw'-rays
GRIJALVA . . . . .	Gree-hal'-vah
JUAREZ . . . . .	Wahr'-ays
LA AMELIA . . . . .	La Ah-mayl'-yah
LACANTÚN . . . . .	Lah-kahn-toon'
LA FLORIDA . . . . .	La Flaw-reed'-ah
LA LIBERTAD . . . . .	La Lee-bayr-tahd'
MÉRIDA . . . . .	May'-reed-ah
OBREGÓN . . . . .	Oh-bray-gohn'
PALENQUE . . . . .	Pal-en'-kay
PASIÓN . . . . .	Pahs-yohn'
PASO SUBÍN . . . . .	Pahs'-oh Soo-been'
PETÉN . . . . .	Pay-tayn'

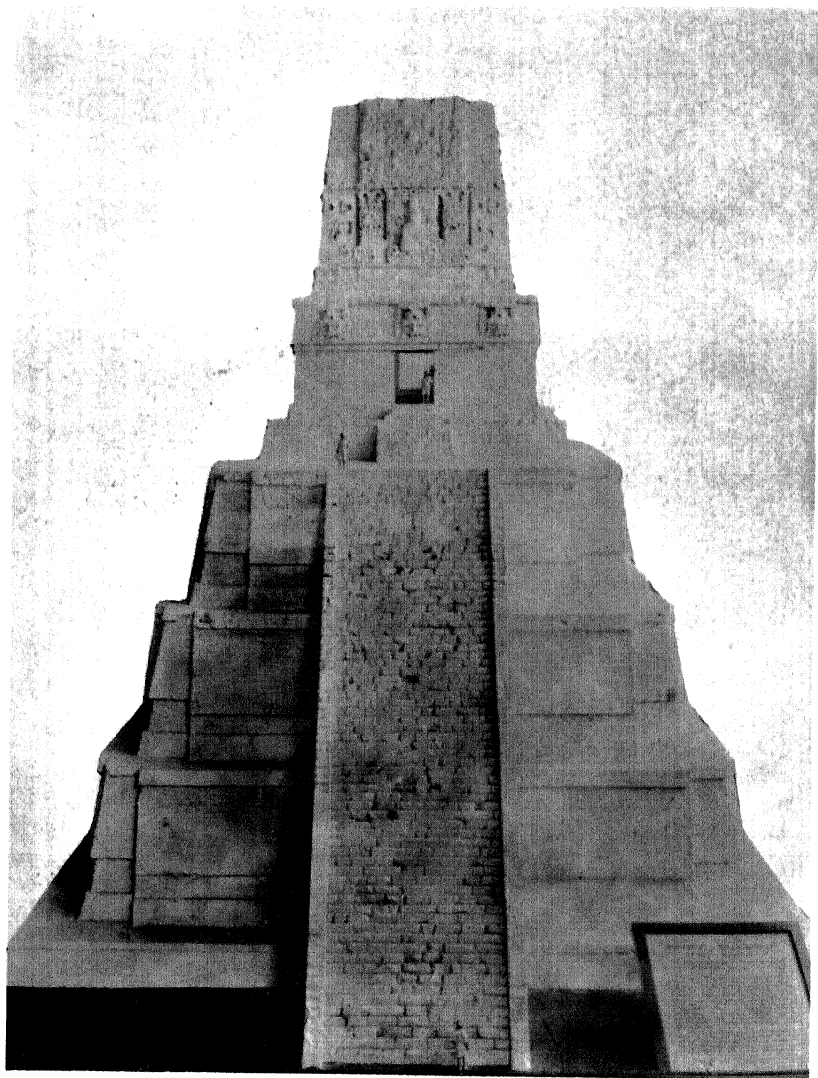
PIEDRAS NEGRAS . . . .	Pee-ay'-dras Nay'-gras
POLOL . . . .	Poh-lohl'
PUERTO BARRIOS . . . .	Pwair'-toh Bah'-ree-ohs
QUIRIGUÁ . . . .	Kee-ree-gwah'
SALINAS . . . .	Sal-een'-ahs
TENOSIQUE . . . .	Tain-oh-seek'-ay
TIKAL . . . .	Tee-kahl'
TRAPICHE . . . .	Trah-pee'-chay
TRES NACIONES . . . .	Trays Nah-syohn'-ays
UAXACTÚN . . . .	Wah-shak-toon'
USUMACINTA . . . .	Oo-soo-mah-scen'-tah
UTATLÁN . . . .	Oo-tah-tlahn'
UXMAL . . . .	Oosh-mahl'
VILLA HERMOSA . . . .	Vee'-yah Air-mohs'-ah
YAXCHILÁN . . . .	Yahsh-chee-lahn'
ZAPATA . . . .	Sah-pah'-tah

## *ILLUSTRATIONS*





TIKAL: Looking West from Temple I



TIKAL: Model of Temple II

(Courtesy of The American Museum of Natural History, New York)





LA LIBERTAD: (*Top*) Evening  
(*Bottom*) Taintor's Residence



(*Top*) Tom on the savannas of Petén  
(*Bottom*) On the way to Polol

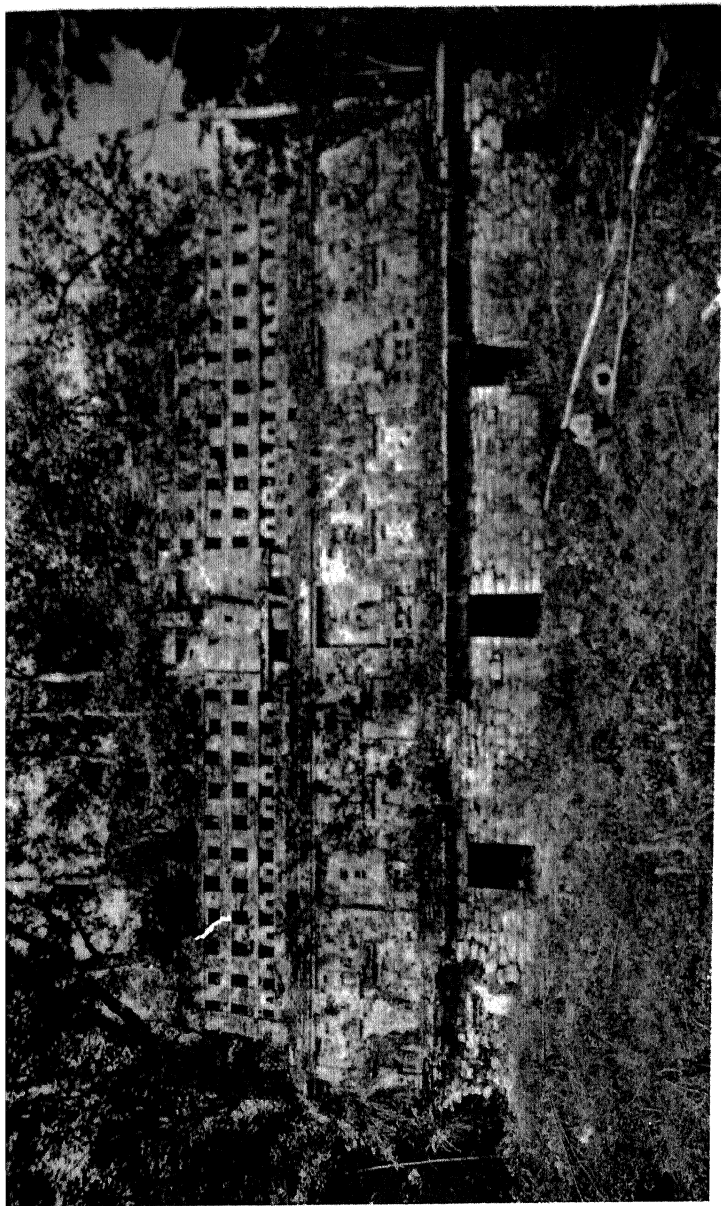


LA AMELIA: Stela I

(*Photograph by Edwin Shook, courtesy of The Carnegie Institution, Washington, D. C.*)



AGUAS CALIENTES: Stela



YAXCHILÁN: Maler's "Temple of Ketzalcoatl . . ."

(Courtesy of Dr. A. M. Tozzer and The Peabody Museum,  
Harvard University)



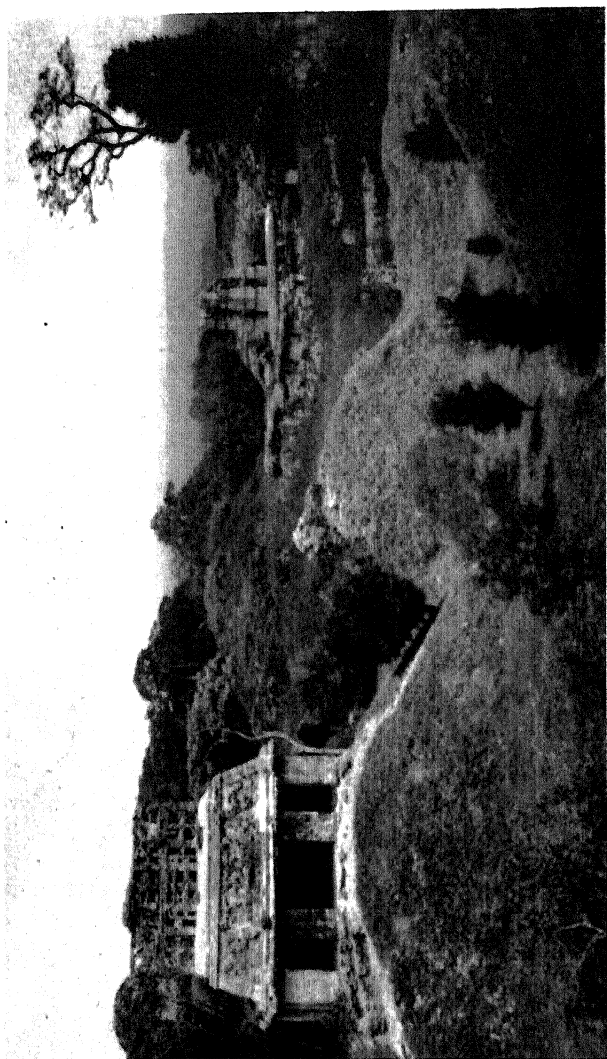
PIEDRAS NEGRAS: Lintel 1

(Courtesy of The Peabody Museum, Harvard University)



PIEDRAS NEGRAS: Lintel 3

(Courtesy of The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania)

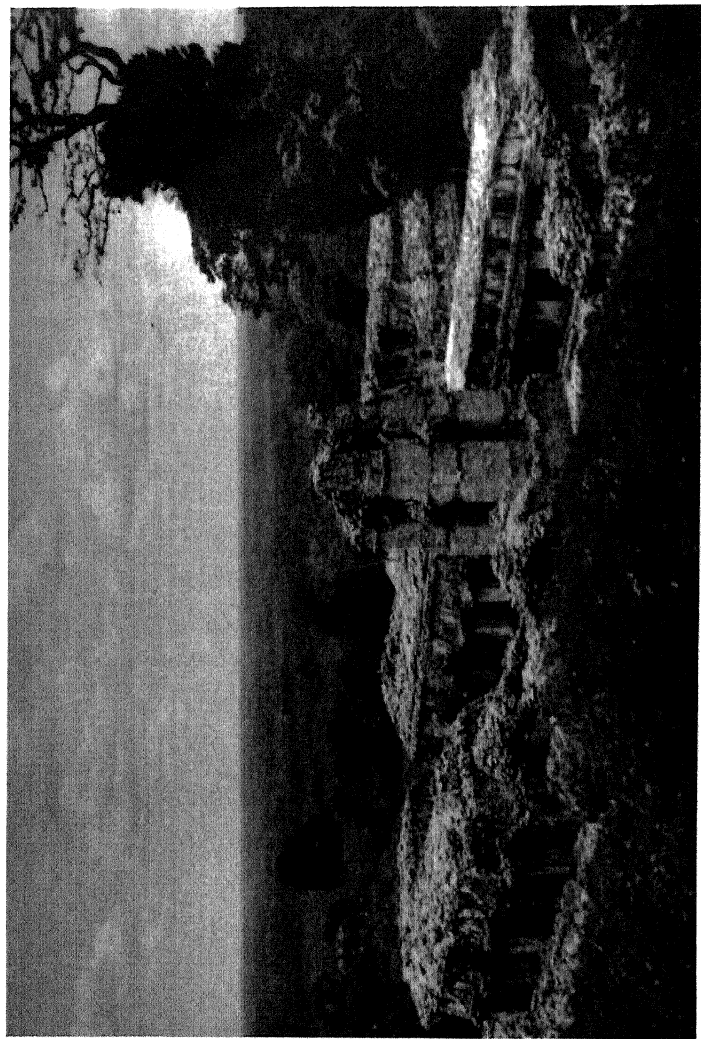


PALENQUE: Temple of the Sun, and Palace

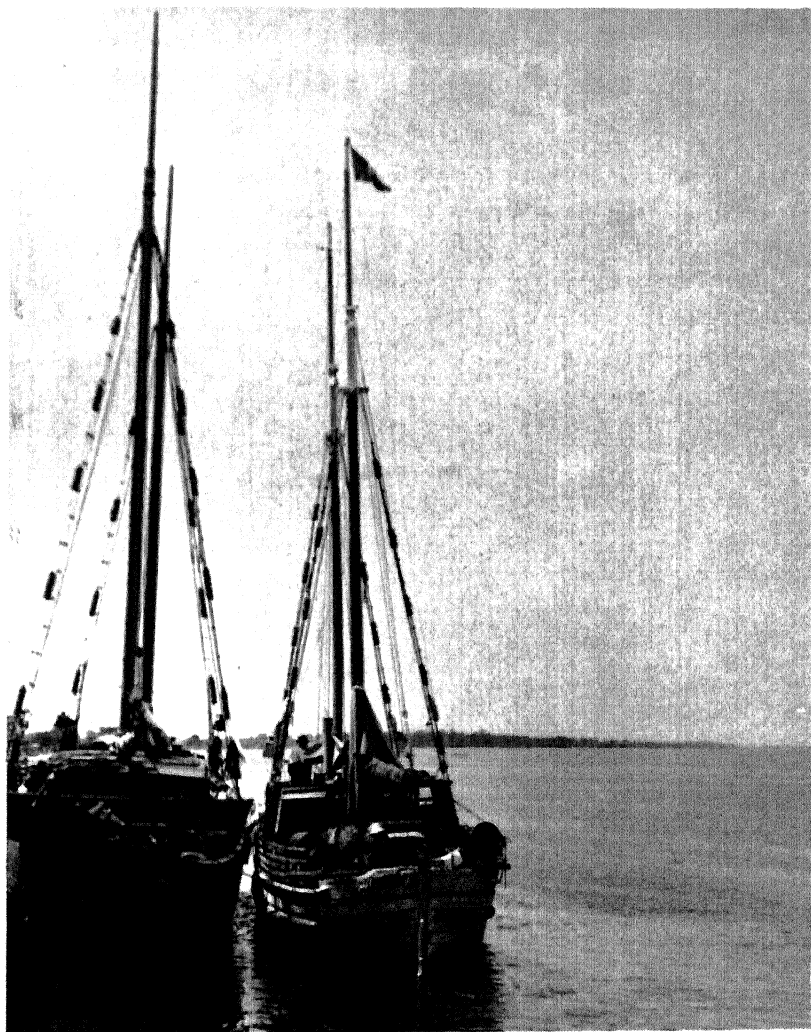




PALENQUE: Palace



PALENQUE: Palace



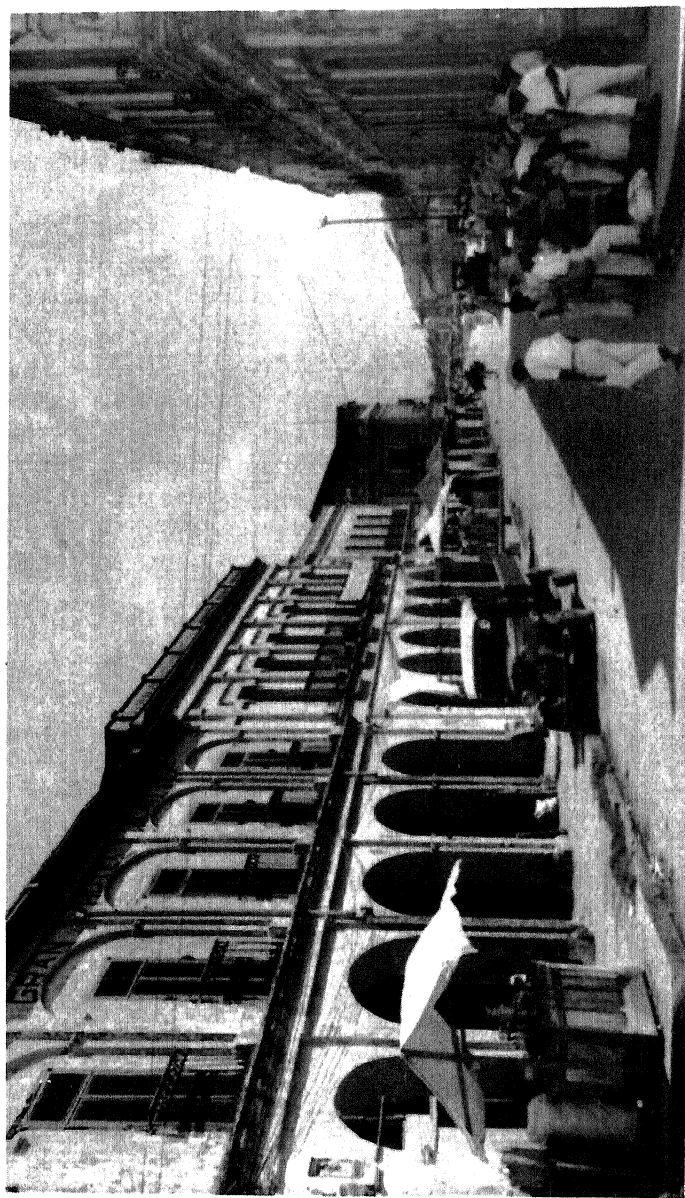
PUERTO ÁLVARO OBREGÓN: *La Esperanza* (right)



TRES NACIONES: Alfonso Lopez and Family



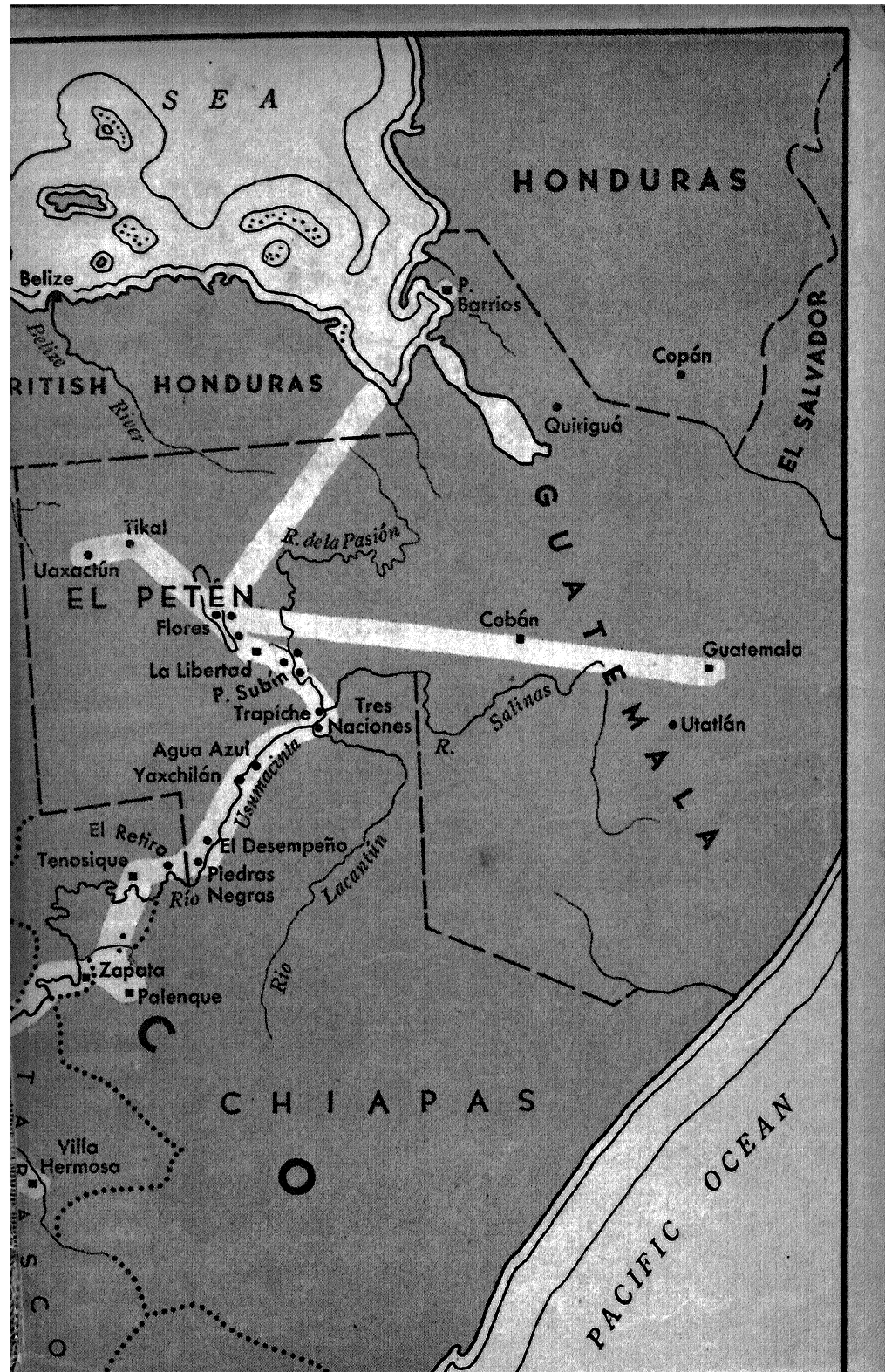
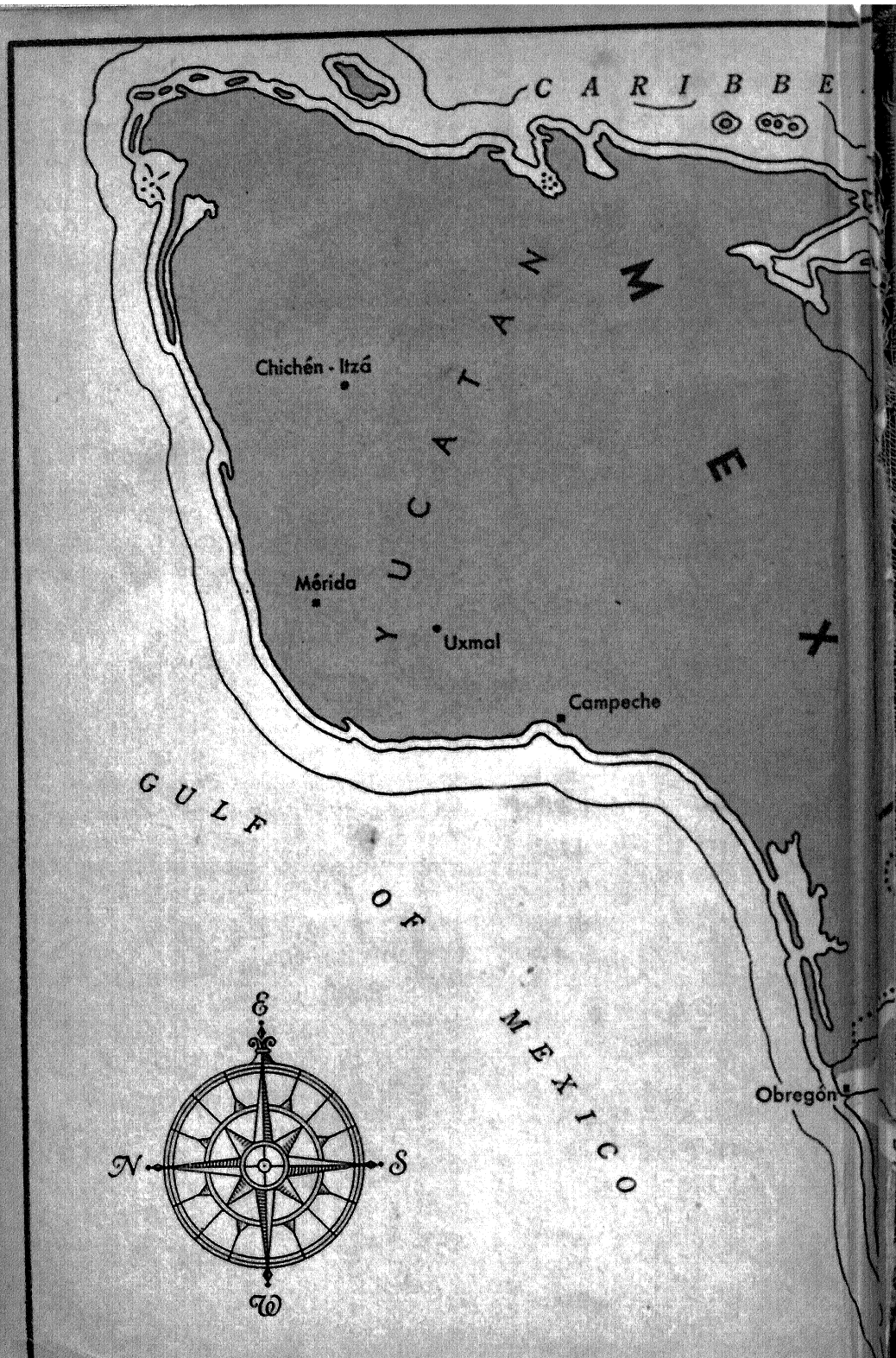
(Top) PUERTO ÁLVARO OBREGÓN  
(Bottom) VILLA HERMOSA: Gran Hotel Palacio



VILLA HERMOSA: Street Scene









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